

**THE EXTRAORDINARY POLITICS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE:
SPONTANEOUS NEIGHBORHOOD GROUPS IN REVOLUTIONARY CAIRO**

by

Hatem M. Hassan

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This Master's thesis was presented

by

Hatem M. Hassan

It was defended on

April 6th, 2014

and approved by

Mohammed Bamyeh, Professor, Sociology

Waverly Duck, Assistant Professor, Sociology

John Markoff, Distinguished University Professor, Sociology

Thesis Director: Mohammed Bamyeh, Professor, Sociology

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Hatem M. Hassan, M.A.

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A revolution consists of more than sit-ins, marches, and strikes; it goes beyond the intellectual and mainstream debates about democracy, Islam, and authoritarianism and, most importantly, retreats from the major spaces of conflict. A revolution manifests itself in the back streets, far away from activists in Tahrir Square. To silence these spaces is to strip Egypt's revolution of its most fascinating characteristics—its spontaneity and emergence from below. In this paper, I bring to light the everyday, local actions of *ordinary*¹ Egyptians during the first 18 days of the revolution.

On January 28th, 2011—as police abandoned the streets and Mubarak's thugs led massive prison breaks—individuals went down to the streets to protect their families and property. Spontaneously, they organized with their neighbors, closing down blocks and setting up checkpoints to protect their streets. Within 24 hours, virtually every block and neighborhood in Cairo was run and operated by its residents. These groups, sometimes referred to as *lijan sha'biyya* (popular committees)—were heterogeneous in their tactics, organization, and efficacy. Yet collectively, these groups were a critical response to the vacuum created by the absence of the police and were one of the deciding factors of Mubarak's downfall.

How did individuals within neighborhood groups cooperate and interact with one another in the complete absence of the state? How did they foster new relationships, achieve their collective objectives, and restore stability? Finally, how do they retell and remember the "Popular Committee" experience long after its disappearance? In this essay, I answer these

¹ The category "ordinary," here, does not refer to "lower classes," "popular forces," or a subaltern group; ordinary are the Egyptians who, prior to 2011, were absent from the formal political realm—who did not identify as activists—whether it was due to (a) their disillusionment of politics in general or (b) their explicit marginalization by political and business elites.

questions based off of 12 semi-structured interviews with former participants of popular committees in two middle class neighborhoods in Cairo, Egypt. I conducted these interviews over the winter of 2013—almost three years after the emergence and quick disappearance of the phenomenon.

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PREFACE

On January 28th, 2011—as police abandoned the streets and the Mubarak regime opened up the prisons—individuals went down to the streets to protect their families and property. Spontaneously, they organized with their neighbors, closing down blocks and setting up checkpoints to protect their individual streets. Within 24 hours, virtually every block and neighborhood in Cairo was run and operated by its residents. These groups—sometimes referred to as popular committees, but more appropriately as *lijan sha'biyya*²—were heterogeneous in their tactics, organization, and efficacy. Yet collectively, they were a critical response to the vacuum created by police disappearance and were inextricably linked to Mubarak's downfall.

How did individuals cooperate and interact with one another in the complete absence of the state? How did they foster new relationships, achieve their collective objectives, and restore stability? How do they remember the “lijan sha'biyya” experience long after its disappearance?

I answer these questions based off of 12 semi-structured interviews with former lijan

² I used *lijan*, instead of the more common “popular committees,” for several reasons. First, the term *lajna*, in modern standard Arabic, literally translates into “committee.” In Egyptian colloquial Arabic, however, it refers to security (usually police or military) checkpoints. A second reason to use *lijan* instead of committee came from a long discussion with the an individual I interviewed. This individual, who was fluent in English, insisted that using the term “committee” was inappropriate given the informality of the group. After concluding my interviews, I reflected on this specific conversation and decided that he was, indeed, correct. I use the term *lijan* to avoid imposing an inappropriately formal connotation to the neighborhood groups that emerged in the first 15 days. However, such a term can be used for later *lijan* that emerged *after* February 11th, 2011 since they did appear to be more formal. A final reason to avoid this translation is because some readers may be aware of other “popular committees” in different countries, such as Greece, Argentina, and Mexico (Oaxaca). The fundamental structure and activities of many of these groups differ may differ considerably from the neighborhood groups in this study. To avoid this confusion, I will use the term *lijan*, short for *lijan sha'biyya*.

participants, most of whom are middle class men in their 20s and 30s from two Cairo neighborhoods: Mohandeseen and Dokki. I conducted these interviews over the winter of 2013—almost three years after the *lijan*'s emergence and quick dissolution.

Rather than focusing on the dramatic events of Tahrir Square, which have already been accounted for by scholars, journalists, and observers, I wish to emphasize the everyday practices of *ordinary*³ individuals during revolutionary moments. The *lijan*'s relationship to the revolution obfuscates the distinction between the state and civil society. On the one hand, participants consciously took on the role of the state by providing basic security, policing their territory, and perpetuating stereotypes that marginalize outsiders. But they did so spontaneously, from below, and without centralized decision-making processes or any formal planning. In other words, they provided an alternative to the state's model of governing. Similarly, while some participants saw themselves as part of the January revolution, many were also happy to return home and "let the state do their job." In this sense, they were revolutionary in their initial practices and emergent form, but did not pursue revolutionary goals of replacing the state. Finally, the *lijan*, although essential to the success of the revolution, neither unanimously agreed with nor wholly opposed to its goals.

The *lijan* problematize our preconceived notions of revolution and its effects on society at large. A revolution consists of more than sit-ins, marches, and strikes; it goes beyond the intellectual and mainstream debates about democracy, Islam, and authoritarianism. A revolution continues into the back streets, far away from Tahrir Square. Here, I hope bring to light the everyday, local actions of ordinary Egyptians during the first 18 days of the revolution. The

³ The category "ordinary," here, does not refer to "lower classes," "popular forces," or a subaltern group; ordinary are the Egyptians who, prior to 2011, were absent from the formal political realm—who did not identify as activists—whether it was due to (a) their disillusionment of politics in general or (b) their explicit marginalization by political and business elites.

following sections are broken up roughly in chronological order. The first section explains the affect that national political developments in Tahrir had on future participants in the lijan. Next, I track the development of the lijan from its spontaneous origins, initial practices and communication, and spatial limitations to its expansion within and across neighborhood all over Cairo, mostly due to its more fluid “membership” during the later days. Finally, I describe the final moments of the lijan and demonstrate how attitudes towards the state and military had shifted since that initial moment of mobilization.

BASIC CHRONOLOGY

Before discussing specific stages, features, and practices, I will provide a brief chronology of the emergence and dissolution of the *lijan*. January 28th, 2011 marked the first day that individuals went out to protect their individual property in response to an explosion of local theft. Residents on most streets—with the exception of the *lijan* on *Gamaet Al Dowwal Al Arabia* St., which were able to collectively act within only a few hours—did not choose establish checkpoints, roadblocks, and shifts until the morning of the 29th.

Channels of communication, as we will see in the second section, changed throughout the 15 days of the *lijan*'s existence. On the morning of the 28th, in a desperate attempt to limit communication among demonstrators and citizens across the nation, the regime cut Internet and mobile services (Richtel 2011; Sutter 2011). Mobile networks were the first to reemerge, returning after 42 to 78 hours. By February 2nd, although the exact dates varied across neighborhood and street, Internet connection had resurfaced. As I will make clear in subsequent sections, the communication freeze, along with the arrival of the military, divided the *lijan* experience into two general phases: (1) the initial days of anxiety with more traditional methods of communication (e.g., landline telephones, word-of-mouth communication, calls from the *muezzin*, walkie-talkies, etc.), and (2) the later, more routine days of the committee where reemerging channels of communication made it possible to call acquaintances, friends, families, and military officials in other *lijan*.

The arrival of the military on residential and commercial streets is perhaps the single most influential event in terms of future *lijan* structures and practices. On the three of the four main streets within my study— Gamaet el Dowwal St., Mohie el Din St., and Lebanon St.—the military created formal checkpoints where they would receive suspected criminals⁴ and monitor street activity. Gamaet el Dowwal St., one of the major arteries connecting Mohandeseen to nearby neighborhoods, witnessed military tanks rolling onto its pavement on the night of the 28th, becoming one of the first streets to witness the defining moment. The army would wait two days to occupy checkpoints on the other main streets in this study. The appearance of military forces on some streets, mostly main streets, and not others affected the practices of the *lijan*. I will call those few, though remarkable, days without military assistance or presence, the initial days of anxiety. Following their appearance, the existence and practices of the *lijan* became a more routine, sometimes mundane, aspect of everyday life.

Other notable events that shaped debates, attitudes, and demobilization during the 15 days of the *lijan* include: (1) a speech made by Mubarak on February 1st, (2) the Battle of the Camel the following day—a day where individuals were hired to ride into Tahrir square on horses and camels to beat and kill protestors—(3) the Military’s announcement that it would protect the streets on February 10th, and, (4) Mubarak’s resignation the following day. The last of these events marked the final day of mobilization for *lijan* participants in *most* neighborhoods across Cairo and other cities, although some exceptions do exist (El Meehy 2012).

⁴ “Suspected,” here, is crucial: the residents who participated in the *lijan* would have created their own system of criminalizing individuals and designating them “*baltagiyya*.” However, the construction of an enemy, by participants at checkpoints, often had little to do with the actual activities of the suspected criminal. Indeed, there were only a few instances during my interviews that a suspect mentioned had actually committed a violent act before being apprehended by citizens and handed over to state or military officials. More commonly, residents labeled the outsider based on a discourse that was previously constructed by the state.

1.0 INITIAL MOBILIZATION: TAKING TO THE STREETS

1.1 JANUARY 28TH: THE DAY OF ANGER

It would be difficult to describe the formation of the *lijan* without explaining its relationship to the events in Tahrir, although several of my interview participants made sure to distinguish between the two. While nationwide protests began on the 25th (national police day), January 28th, known (ahead of time) as the “Friday of Anger,” became the first of several days that would shape the revolution aside from it being the first Friday of the revolution, a national and religious holiday, the 28th was exceptional for its level of mobilization, with hundreds of thousands leaving their homes and going down to the streets. Equally noteworthy, on the Friday of Anger, was the heightened level of repressive tactics that the police unleashed against demonstrators. Finally, and most relevant to the birth of the *lijan*, it is also remembered as the day that prisons⁵ were opened and the police forces vanished from the public eye (Sandels 2011). The rumors around the last of these developments continue to grow. The most accepted version suggests that the Minister of interior, Habib al-Adly, released prisoners, strategically, in order to instill a sense of chaos among the population and discourage Egyptians from marching to Tahrir. Even among

⁵ This is not to say that the prisoners released were connected to the subsequent theft that took place across Cairo during the 28th. Rather, the perception of residents—that these prisoners were somehow and immediately ready to continue “their life of crime”—is likely to have played a significant role in constructing them as their enemy.

my interview respondents, the subject was hotly contested. What is certain is that, in the eyes of many Egyptians, the day of anger was more than that: it was a day of anxiety and uncertainty.

Before discussing the actual emergence of the *lijan*, it is important to mention the role that the Friday of Anger played in the experiences of my interview respondents. Out of the twelve, five went down to the streets and attempted—two of them successfully—to march towards Tahrir Square. *All* of my interviewees, however, began their story by describing the day's events and how it reshaped their attitudes of the police, regime, and likelihood of revolution.

For some, the day was one of conflict between protestors and the police. “It was the first time I smelled tear gas,” one participant told me. In fact, three of the five who went down to the streets were unable to reach Tahrir Square due to the seemingly endless police checkpoints that stood in between their homes and the square. Indeed, those who were unable to reach Tahrir were no less exposed to repression, since the media did not choose to cover these less symbolic streets in their reports. For the two who did make it, the journey was equally memorable.

Waleed,⁶ a future *lijan* participant from the Dokki neighborhood, went down with friends, only to reach Tahrir several hours later. When finally reaching the square, he was immediately separated from his friends. Amidst the rising, suffocating smoke, Waleed decided to call his father, who owned a sports shop only a block away from the square. Exhausted, and after finding his father's store closed, he finally decided to head back home. Kareem's story was even more dramatic:

Noting his previous interest in politics, Kareem was determined to reach the square. He was immediately confronted by the police, who practically met him at his doorstep. After finally reaching Tahrir, he was met with increasingly draconian tactics, live rounds almost grazing his head. Kareem insisted that the

⁶ All names and nicknames have been changed out of respect and safety for my interview respondents.

authorities had fired first. Shocked by the security forces' extreme tactics, Kareem decided to move away from the front line and search for his friends. Suddenly, he found himself on one of these smaller streets near the square. Sealed off at all intersections by riot police, he was forced to seek refuge in a nearby building with tens of others until things settled. Perhaps the most defining moment of Kareem's Tahrir experience, and certainly relevant to his changing attitudes towards the police, was still to come. After hours of skirmishes with the police, Kareem was able to locate friends and begin his journey home. However, before leaving Tahrir, Kareem witnessed several plain-clothed men beating what appeared to be paramedics. Shocked, Kareem approached the ambulance, only to discover that the vehicle, instead of being filled with medical equipment and injured demonstrators, was full of ammunition! Shocked and disgusted, Kareem finally decided to leave the square.

The aforementioned stories, in most popular accounts of the revolution, would be enough to describe the Friday of Anger. The day, however, is permanently engraved into the memory of most Egyptians, even those who refrained from marching to Tahrir. It was the first time that some had directly faced the police and their vicious tactics. Yet, the real anxiety and anger came neither from raised batons nor soaring tear gas canisters, but from the very absence of such weapons when they were expected the most.

1.2 INITIAL EXPERIENCES: THE SPARK THAT SPREAD THE FIRE

Scholars and journalists describing the emergence of the *lijan sha'biyya* have frequently begun with January 29th, describing how Egyptians “woke up” only to realize that the police had vanished from the streets (Olster 2011). But what seemed like a ghost town on the 29th was, in fact, dust settling from the previous day's chaos. Plundering, violence, and destruction on the 28th were as relevant to the everyday lives of millions of Egyptians as were demonstrations, pro-democratic slogans, and peaceful sit-ins to revolutionaries. As the fighting in Tahrir Square was reduced to a simmer, police forces began retreating not only from the important strategic sites,

but from residential and commercial ones as well. By sunset, according to all but two of my interview respondents, local theft and violence had skyrocketed. Televised coverage of looting, eyewitness accounts, and rumors, suggested that the social order was unraveling. It is perhaps best to begin telling the story of the *lijan* at this particular juncture, when one's basic security, not to mention one's family and private property, was threatened at his or her doorstep.

To my interview respondents, witnessing theft on January 28th and 29th was a crucial prerequisite to the emergence of popular committees. Eight of my twelve interviewees were eyewitnesses to the destruction commercial stores, usually chains owned by multinational corporations or symbolically important local businesses. The RadioShack in Dokki, for example, was mentioned by almost all of its residents, as if its destruction by unidentified individuals had somehow captured the gravity of the situation. "I couldn't believe it...I had to go down [there] to see it for myself," one participant explained. Two other participants watched from their balcony as the windows of department stores were shattered and gutted for their merchandise.

Remarkably, four of these eyewitnesses intervened, or attempted to do so, in an effort to thwart further attempts at destruction. Upon returning from Tahrir, on the 28th, Waleed and Kareem were confronted with a wave of violence in their own neighborhoods. The first of the two returned home only to be summoned (via intercom system) by his doorman (*bawwab*). His message was clear, "bring your father, any weapons you may have, and come down to protect your store." Waleed went alone:

Equipped with a knife in one hand and a wooden club in the other, the 23 year-old musician became one of the first defenders of his block. Soon, however, he came to the harsh realization that he was outmatched. Less than an hour after he had went down to the street, Waleed was forced to face a man running with assault rifles wedged in between his chest and biceps, occasionally dropping a weapon as he passed by. Only one hypothesis was likely: He had stolen from one of the most well-known and respected local gun shops in Cairo: *Fathalla*. Waleed, frozen in disbelief, then noticed a friend from a nearby street chasing the man. The

neighbor urged, “Waleed, stop that guy!” Instantly, Waleed began chasing the man. Unable to catch him, he quickly claimed the weapons that the passerby dropped. The friend, a resident of a neighboring street, confirmed Waleed’s worry: the first establishment on his block had been robbed, and it was a gun shop.

Another one of my interviewees lived one building away from the store, and described the theft as his primary motivation to go down to the streets.

After a day of anger in Tahrir Square, Kareem, another interview respondent, thought he could return home to reflect on the day’s remarkable events. Instead, he encountered a night of disbelief. As he and his three friends returned from Tahrir and approached Mohie El Din St., only one block away from his own street, Kareem saw a crowd of approximately thirty men:

Confused at first, but pulled in by the shouting, he walked towards the men only to realize that they were robbing one of the better-known electronic stores. The windows had been shattered, debris accumulated. “The light bulbs, the manikins...even these were being stolen,” Kareem remarks, still with disbelief. Beside the crowd of men leaving and entering the store, there was another, smaller group. “The group was actually trying to reclaim the stolen merchandise...so I thought I would join them,” he tells me. Kareem and five others waited outside the electronic store and began stopping any individual leaving with stolen merchandise. At first, he *tried reasoning with them verbally*, only to realize the futility of his attempts. He then tried physical confrontation, but Kareem made sure to tell me, “I only fight with my hands.” Unfortunately for Kareem, others were not.

After being stabbed by a child trying to get away with a widescreen television, Kareem found his brother and decided to return home.

Theft, if not witnessed from the security of a balcony or experienced on the ground through intervention tactics, was observed through various media outlets. For those future participants, these stories, rumors or not, became the most memorable precursors to the formation of the *lijan*. For the Egyptians who remained at home with their family and friends, landline telephones, television, and word-of-mouth became the primary source of information

regarding local theft. Although my interviewees resided in Dokki and Mohandeseen, they remember discussing events that occurred across the city. Perhaps the most notable of these stories, was the looting of an internationally owned mega-market, *Carrefour*, in the upscale neighborhood of *Maadi*. For symbolic reasons, the plundering of one of the largest stores in Cairo, in *the* most affluent of neighborhoods, became the most popular account among my participants, of the initial theft.

By the morning of January 29th, news reports and rumors had evolved into calls for action. Together, the military, popular hosts of television stations, such as Amr Adeeb, doormen, and local religious figures began urging the Egyptian public to go down to the streets to protect their family, friends, and private property. Perhaps to the surprise of many of these influential figures, the people had already begun organizing.

With all of its clashes and tear gas, the 28th of January was not simply a day of anger; it also marked the first day that many Egyptians chose to protect their streets and neighborhoods. Events in Tahrir triggered a decision from above: to televise the release of prisoners and (temporarily) order officers to retreat from public spaces. It was an intentional method to instill chaos in all Egyptians, not just activists. And although it was never proven who these prisoners were and whether they had *any* connection to the upsurge in theft, it evoked a response from residents who witnessed theft firsthand. Even for those who observed from their balconies or heard about the events from others, the developments made clear that the streets had become a battleground, with the threat reaching the individual's doorstep. For many Egyptians, calls for action, from respected political and cultural figures, had come too little too late. As I will demonstrate, for many of my participants, “the lijan sha’biyya,” as both an identifiable

phenomenon and official name for the neighborhood groups, emerged only *after* these initial confrontations with theft had occurred. Yet, the individual interventions to protect one's immediate family and private property were short-lived. For, in less than 24 hours, most of the neighborhoods in Egypt would be organized by streets, ready to defend each block. The day of anger had boiled down to a simmer, but anxiety was only beginning to overflow onto the streets.

2.0 FROM INDIVIDUALS TO LIJAN: SPONTANEOUS ORGANIZATION AND GETTING TO KNOW THE STREET

The few accounts that describe the emergence of the lijan do so with a brevity that collapses their early days—those incredibly dramatic days—overlooking what were often gradual and complex social processes (Bremer 2011; El Meehy 2012). This is, in part, a result of scholarly preferences to focus on lijan that continued to exist after Mubarak’s resignation, rather than focus on their origins. By searching for those potentially democratic, sustainable and formal groups, scholars end up dismissing the spectacular abilities of ordinary Egyptians to organize collectively with little or no preexisting organizational framework.

To say that the lijan emerged spontaneously and suddenly is not, however, to suggest that the neighborhood groups remained static in their organizational structure throughout their 15-day existence. In this section, I will describe the evolution of the lijan, from the individuals that first went down to the streets to the groups that emerged with established checkpoints, shifts, markers of identification, and other routine practices. The lijan that emerged overnight, between the 28th and 29th, would drastically transform in the coming weeks. By giving equal attention to the formation and evolution of these groups, I hope to explore spontaneity *as a continual process rather than a singular event or phenomenon*.

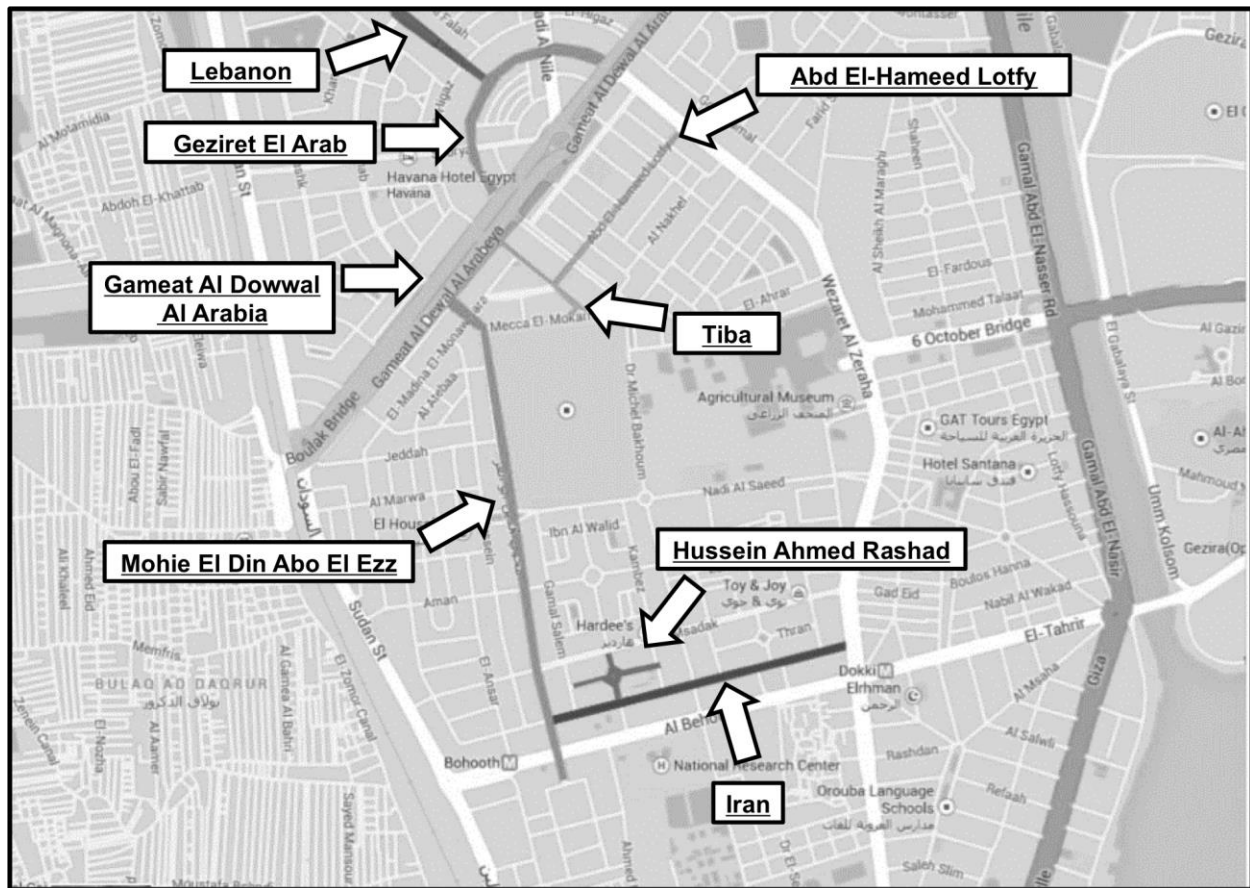


Figure 1. Map of Mohandeseen and Dokki (Cairo, Egypt)

2.1 THE DEGREES OF FAMILIARIZATION

Communication within the lijan was a gradual process that was contingent upon temporal and spatial factors. In large part, the emergence of lijan depended on spontaneous, rather than simply instantaneous, mobilization. I define spontaneity, here, as mobilization that occurred with little help from preexisting organizational bodies, formal and informal (Bamyeh 2013). In the absence of such pre-established groups and networks, residents developed their own distinct processes of familiarization (in the street, among residents, and within the neighborhood) and collective

actions. In this subsection, I will explain how such processes emerged in the first few days of the *lijan* and how they depended on the size of the street, as well as on key events. Next, I explain the innovative and changing practices that residents created and adapted from these new channels of interaction. Finally, I describe the importance of establishing individual reputations, during this familiarization process, and how it affected future roles that residents were expected to play within the *lijan*.

If the Day of Anger opened the eyes of residents in Mohandeseen and Dokki—the two neighborhoods studied here—then the 29th would do the same to their ears. The early days of the *lijan* were filled with more than anxiety; curiosity was equally, if not more, relevant to the experiences of participants. The point, here, is not to essentialize the *lijan* experience with any single emotion. But curiosity, to be sure, was important to several of my participants. When asking one of residents on Mohie El Din St. to describe the moments before going down to the streets, he recalled, “I heard noises and didn’t understand why the streets were otherwise so calm and dark. I went down and saw a group. I didn’t know anyone but I started getting to know people then.” Two others mentioned that they heard a noise coming from the streets before deciding to leave their homes. When asking why they chose to investigate this noise—a sound, which to four interviewees, resembled a yelling crowd—one responded, “What are you going to do? If there is a thief on your street you want to protect your home before they come in.” Others, specifically those residents on side streets, heard calls from a more familiar source: the *muezzin* from their local mosque. For at least seven of my participants curious enough to respond, the

sounds of the street provided the first of incentives to investigate the developing situations within their neighborhoods.⁷

Aside from recalling sensory experiences, several participants stressed the importance of *social* interaction during the first hours of the 29th. In the absence of Internet and mobile services, residents chose to depend on communication via word-of-mouth and landlines. Three participants, two on Mohie El din and one on Lebanon St., consulted friends prior to going down to the streets. They called, however, not to meet with those specific individuals, but to ensure that their friends in other parts of the neighborhood were making the same decision. Only to this extent, were the residents aware of the initial formation of *lijan* before going down themselves. For the most part, however, individuals left their homes without a plan. They would stand outside their buildings defending their individual property with whatever weapons they had available. This was the *first degree* of familiarizing oneself to others on the street.

If defensive tactics were individualistic at first, it would not remain that way for long. The rate at which collective action would emerge depended largely on the perceived and actual danger that each street confronted. On Geziret El Arab St., one of the most well-known and upscale commercial centers in Mohandeseen, residents quickly collaborated, responding to the extraordinary wave of looting that occurred during the 28th. Newly formed neighborhood groups were primarily concerned with protecting banks, designer stores, supermarkets, and (to a lesser extent) apartment buildings. Residents of Geziret El Arab St. were, therefore, unique insofar as they chose not to stand immediately outside their homes or cars, gravitating towards the more

⁷ Before proceeding, it must be said that the point of this study is not to understand the motivating factors of participating in *lijan*, but rather to explain the process of participation and provide a local history of the *lijan* during 15 of the first 18 days of the revolution. Throughout my interviews, respondents mentioned the importance of listening during the *lijan*. The initial yelling in the streets is but one example; other examples include listening for the ringing gunshots of a concerned resident (mentioned below) and the metal clanking of an approaching tank. Whether or not we want to partially attribute mobilization to sensorial experiences, it would be difficult to explain the initial emergence of the *lijan* without them.

targeted areas—what I call the second degree of familiarization. Intersections, at this phase, become the central meeting ground for newly acquainted neighbors. Once they had parted from their own property, neighbors were able to quickly distribute and share weapons and innovative communication techniques. One participant emphasized the importance of quickly establishing relationships among his neighbors, insisting, “We didn’t have time.” He quickly asked fellow residents, “about the school [they went] to, [their] occupation, and where they lived.” Visual and demographic information became markers for distinguishing residents from outsiders.

Although I will go into more depth in the next section, it is important to mention the collective processes unique to side streets. By the 29th, residents on most side streets had established new relationships with neighbors from the same building, block, and street. Like residents on Geziret El Arab St., individuals on side streets were quicker at establishing a network of trusted neighbors. This was possible for several seasons. The first was the ability for a *muezzin* to call residents to action. As a respected religious leader on the streets, it is highly likely that the muezzin played an influential role for mobilizing residents. Second, the structure of social relationships was often of a different nature on side streets. Seeing familiar faces, to some of my participants, often provided the impetus for introducing themselves to complete strangers. The existence of preexisting networks, however, was rare, although there were certainly exceptions. For example, a resident from Abd El-Hameed Lotfy St. attended primary and middle school with most other residents his age and had an already established network of friends whom he met with during the first day of the *lijan*. A third distinguishing characteristic of side streets was the preexisting role and reputation of doormen in Egyptian culture. As de facto security guards, *bawwabeen* became central to initial mobilization processes on Tiba St., Lebanon St., and Abd El-Hameed Lotfy St. In the apartment buildings of two of my interviewees

(Tiba St.), doormen were the first to call residents to the streets (via intercom systems). Doormen played less of a role on the main streets in this study. Finally, and most importantly, side streets were essentially insulated, from nearby neighborhoods that were deemed, by residents and the state media, as “dangerous.” All participants on side streets went from standing outside their apartment buildings to standing at intersections where their smaller streets met larger ones. “This way,” a *lijan* participant from Ahmad Rashad St. tells me, “we can protect the middle portions of streets by guarding the main entrances on opposite ends.” Although it can hardly be said the *any* of the streets analyzed here had a shortage of residents protecting them, this technique—of patrolling only the main intersections—eased the pressure of participating in the *lijan*.

Residents on main streets were relatively more hesitant at moving beyond their homes during the first few days—that is, moving beyond the first degree and on to the second degree of familiarization. In fact, with regards to establishing and extending one’s social network, the most important event for *lijan* on larger streets, such as Mohie El Din St. and Gamaet el Dowwal St., was the arrival of the military as early as the night of the 28th, but more commonly on the 30th of January. Despite the sense of security provided by the military, residents on Gamaet el Dowwal St. and Mohie el Din St. did not move beyond the immediate vicinity of their apartment buildings during the first few days. A resident on Mohie El Din St. told me quite explicitly that he did not feel confident interacting with other neighbors or establishing any “official” or “formal” practices before the 30th: “The *lijan sha’biyya* did not exist until the 31st,” the same resident tells me. What he meant here was not that streets were empty during the first three days, but that collective practices and routines (2nd degree) did not emerge until participants heard the metal clanking of approaching military tanks.

While the rapidity and geographic scope of a *lajna*'s social network depended on the perceived and actual dangers during the 28th and 29th, as well as the size and relative location of each street, both main and side street *lijan* were ultimately able to extend their networks beyond their immediate territory. The relationships that *lijan* had with each other will be discussed in further detail in the sections to come. For now, it is important to mention that many of my participants, but especially ones living on main streets, were able to go visit friends in Tahrir Square and *lijan* in other neighborhoods as the military presence became more widespread and noticeable. In part, this relates to the decreasing legitimacy of the military-sponsored curfew. As many *lijan* participants established relationships with military officers and introduced themselves to residents in other checkpoints, movement across streets and entire neighborhoods became less of an inconvenience and more of a routine. As we will see later, the decline of theft and presence of the military, as well as the increasing banality of neighborhood groups as the days passed, provided the *lijan*'s organizational structure with a certain fluidity. By breaking through the spatial limitations of one's own neighborhood, however nonchalantly it may have seemed, residents managed to move into a third degree of familiarization.

The official name for these growing neighborhood groups, *lijan sha'biyya*, began to gain relevance only *after* individual practices morphed into collective efforts. Many participants insisted, as the previous quote demonstrated, that *lijan* did not emerge on the 28th or 29th, but that their official appearance could be marked when the first checkpoints were established and informal shift systems appeared. The title, "*lijan sha'biyya*," was first heard on a national public radio service announcement on the night of the 28th. During this announcement, they described the neighborhood groups on Geziret El Arab St. as the *first* *lijan* formed in Cairo. In the days to come, military announcements and popular hosts of state-owned television channels would use

the term to call citizens to action and applaud them for their efforts.⁸ Although the use of the term, by participants, is often associated with the later, more routine practices of the *lijan*, and not the initial social processes I have described thus far, it is important to consider when the term was first heard by participants and how official announcements may have reified the future structure of more routinized *lijan*.

Spontaneous mobilization on the 28th was not the end of the *lijan* story. In the absence of preexisting social networks, residents chose to establish new relationships, first with residents in their apartment buildings (1st degree), then with neighbors on their street (2nd degree), and eventually with individuals across neighborhoods (3rd degree). Exceptionally high levels of looting led some residents, such as those in the Geziret El Arab St. *lijan*, to establish their social networks more rapidly. Likewise, on side streets, the role of mosques and *bawwabeen* (doormen), as well as the security provided by main streets, led to quickly evolving social networks. Residents on main streets, on the other hand, were more gradual in their approach, collectively acting only *after* the military forces arrived. Varying uses of the term “*lijan sha’biyya*” in popular media—sometimes referring to formalized groups and at other times used to explain the phenomenon in general—may obscure these differences and ignore the gradual social process that allowed the *lijan* to develop without a preexisting network of organizations and individuals. The process is perhaps best described by one participant in the Lebanon St. *lijan*: “you met [them] one-by-one...as you met new people from one building, you would realize

⁸ As several of my participants told me, the term *lijan sha’biyya* was familiar in Egyptian popular culture decades before the 2011 revolution. The term was originally used during the 1967 Six-Day War and 1973 Arab–Israeli Wars. It was later popularized by depictions in Egyptian and Arab cinema. The term was also commonly used in Palestine and during Palestinian solidarity rallies in 2000. In all cases, past and contemporary, the term was meant to explain collective actions at the neighborhood level.

they had friends in the next building...eventually the whole street was connected.” He continues explaining, “The original lajna referred to each *individual* checkpoint at intersections and entrance points...a single street consisted of multiple lijan, which would have overlapping members.” Checkpoint by checkpoint, individuals established relationships and created networks of trusted residents. Although I have, so far, described the formation of the lijan by explaining the expansion of their social networks, new relationships were sustained through *shared sets of practices*. In the next section, I trace the trajectory and development of collective action across lijan, emphasizing the importance of innovation and the sharing of ideas.

2.2 ESTABLISHING CHECKPOINTS, SHIFTS, AND OTHER PRACTICES

The three degrees or phases of familiarization, described above, occurred without influence from pre-established organizations or networks. That is to say, the participants of the Mohandeseen and Dokki lijan⁹ spontaneously created social networks in a gradual process that depended on (a) the spatial structure of the street and neighborhood, and (b) the resources available to them (e.g., weapons, blockades, etc.). As a consequence, participants of these newly formed collective enterprises were forced to work without blueprint for action. Instead, the efforts of ordinary Egyptians translated into innovative practices that were at times driven by necessity and, in other circumstances, were borrowed from other lijan. The absence of help from organizations and institutional bodies meant that residents were unable to tap into a prepackaged collective repertoire of action, at least consciously. This is not, of course, to deny that the “new” practices

⁹ According to several informal discussions with participants from the lijan in Maadi (another neighborhood), spontaneous formation was not always the case. Yet, these individuals did not expand on their explanation, simply insisting that it was a planned and highly organized effort.

of the lijan were not rooted in any past cultural or institutional traditions. Rather, if such structural factors did influence participants it was largely through informal channels. Many times during my interviews, participants were clueless to the origins of certain practices, and none of my participants suggested being influenced by groups preceding the revolution. Newly formed and still growing social networks provided residents with both the agency to innovate and the willingness to adapt one's practices as they learned from other lijan and through their own trial and error. This section will focus on the emergence and transformation of the lijan's shared practices. Unlike the establishment and expansion of social networks, the creation and adoption of specific activities did not depend on the size of the street. Yet, similar to the previous section, each practice and its utility depended on the changing context around the lijan. Therefore, it is best to begin before the military's omnipresence, since it was during the early days of the lijan that the perception of danger reached its peak.

2.2.1 Early Tactics and Danger: Gunshots, Roadblocks, and light bulbs

The earliest tactics used by the participants of the lijan were largely impersonal—after all, they had yet to move beyond their own apartment buildings—but highly effective in their intended functions. From the night of the 28th until the 30th, residents and lijan participants focused on three objectives above all: (1) preventing any potential outsiders from entering the residents' specific street by *creating an illusion* that participants were acting collectively, (2) keeping residents alert of any danger and unifying their responses, and (3) preventing residents from falling asleep during the overnight shifts. During the first three days of the lijan, residents from at least five of the eight streets studied regularly fired into the air as an emotional response and strategic action to keep residents alert and outsiders afraid. One participant from Iran St.

exaggerated the effectiveness of the practice, recalling, “In exactly 30 seconds [after the sound of gunshots], you could find the whole block had gone down into the streets to protect it.” Firing a gun, however individualistic it may have seemed, evoked a collective response from concerned citizens during the early days of the lijan. Residents also kept their balcony lights on, another impersonal though less confrontational practice that, when performed on a wide scale, may have been effective at intimidating potential outsiders.¹⁰

As another defensive measure, residents were able to effectively blockade their streets, creating physical boundaries between insiders and outsiders. This early tactic became the prerequisite to establishing checkpoints throughout one’s street. It also marked the first step towards building one’s social network, since it often took more than a single individual to transport barricades and heavy items to opposite ends of the street. Yet, the strength and duration of such relationships should not be exaggerated. One participant on Mohie el Din St. who helped set up road blocks, recalls how he and other members “closed off the streets with anything we could find...I looked for the largest men that would [be able to] help us the most...we took the barricades used by the [abandoned] banks and moved them into the streets.” He was unable to name any of those “large men,” who helped him close off Mohie el Din St. on the 29th. On some streets, such as Geziret El Arab St., it would only take a single individual to propose the idea of blocking the roads. In most cases, however, participants were unable to identify where the idea came from. Common among all lijan, however, was that they each used the resources available to them. For example, many side streets used stacks of broken branches and cones to block the

¹⁰ Perhaps such a practice is in line with the “nonmovements” that Asef Bayat (2013) argues is characteristic of authoritarian contexts across the Middle East and Arab world. Nonmovements, to him, are atomized practices that gradually aggregate to provoke substantive social change.

road; another used a microbus. Regardless of the source of the original idea, blocking roads required creative and collective efforts.

2.2.2 Learning from Earlier Practices, Creating Boundaries, and Having Fun

Without a rigid guideline for action, and equipped with a rapidly growing social network, lijan participants were able to abandon certain practices and experiment with new ones. Roadblocks became the first step to establishing physical and ideological boundaries, distinguishing insiders from outsiders, while providing lijan with concrete, identifiable territories. Establishing checkpoints became the trademark of the lijan. In fact, “lijan,” in colloquial Egyptian Arabic translates into (security) checkpoint (see first footnote). The first step in forming lijan was to establish an individual checkpoint (or *lajna*) at each intersection. Intersections provided residents with a location to communicate amongst each other and with lijan participants from other, intersecting streets—thereby establishing a second degree of familiarization. As this section will demonstrate, residents used checkpoints to prevent easy entrance onto a street, frisk suspects, communicate with other lijan, and test the limits of their own authority while undermining that of state officials.

If creating blockades became the stepping-stone for establishing checkpoints, the next step in the lijan development was abandoning the shooting tactic and adopting a more effective practice for keeping residents alert. Participants, from all five streets that had used the tactic, agreed that firing live rounds was only effective at spreading fear among *residents* and creating mass confusion during the first few days of the lijan. Instead, residents gathered in the newly established checkpoints and opted for a new strategy: they would shout from checkpoint-to-checkpoint, the words *Ishah* (wake up!) and *Ilhaa* (go after him/her/them!) if there was a

perceived threat approaching the lijan. Residents from all eight streets in this study began using this yelling tactic regularly. Instead of being rattled, residents would receive alerts and messages through this wave-like communication channel. At times, this method led to the rapid spread of rumors. Yet, the practice was, according to *all* my interview respondents, effective at keeping both lijan participants and observing residents alert of any perceived dangers. Only after abandoning the gunshot approach were they able to effectively communicate without asking, “who shot first?”

Checkpoints were not the only development that created divisions between insiders and outsiders, labeling innocent and suspect. Other practices gradually developed and were, in the case of some side streets, learned from participants on other streets. After the 29th, residents hoping to march to Tahrir, check on nearby family members, or purchase supplies during non-curfew hours faced unexpected harassment. One participant stressed the difficulty of entering different streets and crossing into nearby neighborhoods during the initial days of the lijan, explaining how it “was extremely dangerous...[if] you didn’t have at least a friend in the lajna there...you would get harassed and could even lose your life.” Residents at checkpoints took several measures to distinguish between “safe” and “dangerous” outsiders. First, they would request a state identification card with a home address and would ask the outsider why he or she had travelled far from his or her place of residence. Second, the lijan established one password for all the checkpoints on an individual street. This way, daily commuters would only once have to face interrogation. Third, for insiders trying to return home, armbands were created from torn articles of clothing and painted a street-specific color for quick identification. This last technique was used less on side streets and was usually taken less seriously than the first two. The final and most creative screening tactic was used on vehicles trying to enter or pass through a street.

Participants from each checkpoint would alter one feature on the car so that individuals standing at the next checkpoint knew the car had entered the street legitimately. For example, the first *lajna* on Mohie El Din St. raised a windshield wiper, the second asked the driver to fold in a rearview mirror, a third asked the same driver to pull down the passenger's rearview mirror (and so on). Participants from each checkpoint would then know (a) the direction the outsider came from and (b) which specific checkpoints they had passed.

In some cases, residents standing at checkpoints approached screening processes with humor. As mentioned, the creation of passwords was a quick and effective solution to the traveller's problem. Precisely *which* words were chosen as passwords can offer us a glimpse of the comedic aspects found in almost all of the *lajan* in this study. One participant told me that he chose "I've lost my flip-flop," as a password to purposively irritate a specific individual who was known for his short temper. Another example involves Mortada Mansour, a notoriously exploitative lawyer who lived on Tiba St. at the time. When seeing Mansour's car approaching Tiba St., instead of yelling the customary "Ilhaa" ("go after him/her/them!"), one resident waiting at the first checkpoint yelled towards his balcony, "Father, your sweetheart is here!" These examples provide a small glimpse of the importance of humor *throughout* the existence of the *lajan*. As tactics were routinized and the dangers subsided, participants were able to creatively manipulate known practices to provide entertainment during the long hours of the *lajan*.

2.2.3 Establishing Shifts: Social expectations and accountability

After the 29th, residents made the decision to keep checkpoints running around the clock. *Lijan* participants on each street, however, decided whether official shifts were necessary. Sometimes, older members of the *lajan* would assign specific younger participants to checkpoints. On Tiba

St., for example, older participants created two shifts on the 29th, one from 5pm to 11pm and an overnight shift. The former was assigned to participants of all ages, while the latter was exclusively the responsibility of younger participants (from early 20s to mid 30s). However, even on Tiba St., participants frequently continued to stand at checkpoints well after their shift.

Residents on all other streets, however, made no mention of official shifts. The loose enforcement of shifts was, in part, a result of the large numbers of residents that volunteered during the early days of the lijan. “We had more than enough people on the street,” one resident tells me. In fact, one reason that participants on larger streets, such as Mohie El Din St., began visiting friends at other lijan was precisely because there were “too many” residents standing at each checkpoint. Widespread participation rendered the delegation of specific shifts to individuals unnecessary. The lijan of Hussein Ahmed Rashad St. offer us a unique exception to this pattern. The muezzin of a nearby mosque called residents on this street to action only when the checkpoints *needed* additional volunteers. Still, even this practice was seen as a request and not a demand.

Informal shifts were established not through coercive measures (e.g., top down delegation of duties). Rather, individuals came to expect specific individuals to perform particular tasks based on their physique, experience, or a combination of both. One exception came from a resident on Mohie El Din St., who complained how he was made fun of by participants his age when he tried to return to his home. More often than not, however, residents were entirely free to choose when they would stand at a checkpoint. In some cases, friends newly acquainted with one another would ask each other (via landlines or on the street) when they were thinking of standing at a checkpoint, and would go down together. In other lijan, such as the ones on Tiba St., there existed a Tahrir-lijan tradeoff, where one individual would stand at a checkpoint one day in

exchange for being excused to march to Tahrir on the next. The friend who went to Tahrir the day before was, today, responsible for his friend's position back home. Thus, shifts were *informally* enforced by residents who expected their neighbors to "pay their dues."

The lijan's' practices changed throughout the course of their existence and were dependent on new obstacles faced by participants. Over-the-top practices, such as shooting live rounds into the air, were quickly abandoned for less extreme methods of communication. Other innovations, such as the creation of barricades and then checkpoints, were built upon one another. The primary objective of these developments was to concrete boundaries between outsiders and insiders, making entrance and exit easier for the latter. When the initial anxiety had subsided, younger participants were able to use these practices for their own amusement. Yet, with older participants present, certain practices were sometimes monitored. Establishing shifts was, in one case, a function of the elderly. Yet, more frequently, checkpoints were maintained not through coercive measures but as a result of voluntary decisions. Indeed, we can call these growing social networks and developing practices *spontaneous processes* in that residents sought out an alternative logic to collectively organizing without any previous blueprint or dominant organizational structure. In the next section, I show how reputations developed alongside, but also helped to make possible, these networks and practices.

2.3 ROLES AND REPUTATIONS

Thus far, my analysis has privileged, quite purposefully, the collective efforts within the lijan. But the story of the lijan reveals novel and rapidly changing social relationships; participants came and went on an hourly basis. In order to accommodate the fluidity of the lijan membership,

cooperation on any given street came to rely on the expected roles of certain social groups (e.g., youth, men, educated, etc.) and individuals. In this section, I focus how individual reputations became an important element in the functioning of the lijan. Reputations, however, may affect the collective and individual both positively and negatively. Participants can use social status to create negative stereotypes and reproduce power dynamics already in place. But they can also make noticeable the redeeming qualities and contribution of specific individuals. In the lijan, we see both.

The reliance of the lijan on its older participants was particularly important for the early survival of the lijan. Through age and experience, certain individuals became known for mediating conflicts and giving the “final word” on any controversial decisions. Although it would be a gross exaggeration to suggest that lijan functioned through an age hierarchy, young participants respected decisions of their elders, especially when it related to establishing shifts, dealing with suspects, and monitoring unnecessary harassment at checkpoints. To be sure, older residents, for the most part, spent less time on the streets than younger participants. Yet, only the older participants were considered experienced enough to perform certain functions, such as dealing with firearms. They were also responsible for distributing weapons, an important practice in the first few days of the lijan. Young members were restricted to sticks, knives, and wooden clubs. When asking my participants, none of whom exceeded the age of 34, why they did not contest the authority of older individuals, one responded “[I knew] they did it out of concern for our safety, more than anything else.” When I followed up by asking whether the younger members challenged any decisions, he simply responded, “*mayyenfa’sh*,” or “it is inappropriate.” The power balance is less likely to be specific to the lijan experience than part of longer running traditions and customs embedded into the everyday practices of Egyptians. An exploration into

the role of age, in Egyptian society, is far beyond the scope of this essay. Relevant here are the consequences of this tradition: namely, that older lijan participants earned the reputation for being the final decision makers, mediators, and problem solvers because they were *perceived* to be more experienced and knowledgeable than younger members.

Although the expected role of some in the lijan may have been the result of long-running customs and traditions, the reputations of specific participants came from their performance during the 15 days of the lijan's existence. Take, for example, Kareem, a resident of Gamaet el Dowwal St. and crucial player in the lijan. Like the men who helped set up barricades at major intersections, Kareem was quickly noticed, by his neighbors and outsiders, for his physical appearance. Well built and tall, he was asked to stand at a checkpoint that bordered one of the more stigmatized popular neighborhoods (*manatiq sha'biyya*) in Egypt: Bulaq al Daqrur. "I became known for handling the baltagiyya from Bulaq," he mentions, and then laughs. Yet, his reputation went beyond his physical appearance. After talking with many of his neighbors during the first few days of the lijan, Kareem mentioned that he had experiences riding motorcycles. In the days to come, Kareem became *the sole individual* responsible for driving confiscated rickshaws (*takatik*) or accompanying outsiders as they drove through the street. Finally, having established a relationship with one army general posted at a nearby lajna, Kareem took on the role of a deputy, taking suspects either to the general himself or calling him to send for assistance when a conflict arose.

Other participants recognized Kareem's physical traits, practical experience, and relationships, and relied on him to live up to his reputation. On the one hand, this made Kareem a respected figure in the lijan, allowing him to resolve conflicts. On the other hand, reputations pressure the individual to invest his or her time performing specific functions.

Negative reputations were just as common in the lijan. Recall the irritable Mortada Mansour, an infamous lawyer known across the country for his petty lawsuits, narcissistic behavior, and inappropriate language. On one occasion, Mortada was approaching his home on Tiba St. when stopped at the first checkpoint. Blocked by a microbus that was used as a blockade, Mortada began shouting and insisted that the participants let him in without identification. Knowing well who he was, younger residents at the checkpoint refused to let him enter. After Mansour exited his car and threatened some of the participants, older residents intervened and demanded, once again, to see Mansour's identification. Eventually, the conflict was resolved. Yet, from that day on, Waleed tells me amusingly, that Mansour would have a difficult time not only leaving and entering Tiba St., but getting past the neighboring streets as well. His negative reputation went beyond petty harassment; it dramatically decreased his mobility during the 15 days, and made his participation in the lijan impossible.

Not everyone is a famous lawyer. In other instances, individuals gained a negative reputation from their practices and behavior during time spent in the lijan. Similar to Kareem, many participants were judged by their physical appearances. Yet, unlike the positive qualities associated with well-built men, negative connotations were often attached to participants who "looked like baltagiyya." Negative reputations could also emerge from behaviors. One resident on Mohie El Din St. often barged his way into the conversations of well-respected elders. One participant tells me, "He didn't understand anything going on...and here he was sitting and talking to a CEO!" Such behavior, although tolerated by the Mohie El Din St. residents, would severely limit the role that this individual played within his lijan.

Reputations are a ubiquitous phenomenon found in a whole range of social processes. Although not particular to the lijan, individual reputations and stereotypes affected the roles

played by specific participants. At times, reputations were positive and afforded individuals certain privileges. Traditional cultural practices and social norms caused younger participants to look up to their elders, specifically when the latter needed assistance resolving conflicts or dealing with unusual developments. Kareem's physical strength, learned experiences, and known relationships made him responsible for specific tasks, but transformed him into a respected figure in the Gamaet el Dowwal St. lijan. Negative reputations, however, were just as frequent. Pre-existing reputations, physical appearances, and irregular behaviors could all negatively affect one's relationships and participation within the lijan, as well as their overall mobility within and across neighborhoods. Whether positive or negative, reputations affected the lijan's participation processes and policing practices throughout its 15 days of existence. Only by looking at these internal dynamics do we see the importance of establishing a positive image of oneself and how this affects one's lijan experience. Relying on reputations, in order to utilize the skills of some residents while excluding the "uselessness" of others, emerged in the absence of a previously formed organizational structure or social network.

The spontaneous birth of the lijan should not be dismissed nor should it cause one to privilege the more routinized chapter of the narrative. If anything, mobilization that occurs without significant pre-existing organizational bodies may lead individuals to create distinct social processes with their own internal logic. For lijan participants, this meant gradually establishing new relationships within their immediate vicinity and extending one's social network thereafter. The type of street—large, main streets or small, side streets—that one lived on affected the pace and extent to which this social network would emerge. In other instances, residents facing an extraordinary level of looting "had no time" for the gradual process. These

rapidly growing networks of residents would come to affect the development of the lijan. Innovative, but ineffective practices were quickly abandoned, while useful ones became the foundation for future tactics. Informally enforced and creatively manipulated, such practices demonstrate the dynamism of the lijan and ingenuity of its participants. However, not all participants fulfilled the same roles and enjoyed the same types of privileges. It was important for residents to establish reputations early on if they hoped to play an active role on their street, although sometimes stereotypes were rooted in deeper traditions. Reputations could also spread beyond a single street and could affect one's mobility, positively or negatively, throughout the 15 days. Together the networks, collective practices, and individual actions of the participants contributed to the development of the lijan and moved it beyond its spontaneous origins. Eventually, main and side, targeted and ignored, streets would resemble capillaries and arteries, with Egyptians rushing back and forth as the developments changed.

3.0 FROM STREET TO STREET: THE LINK BETWEEN THE COMMITTEES

3.1 SIDE STREETS AND MAIN STREETS

By now, the reader may have realized that not all streets functioned in the same way during the 15 days of the *lijan*. Side and main streets are defined and perceived differently by residents, state officials, and outsiders. When analyzing my interview data, I came to identify side and main streets, in part, by how the residents perceived it themselves. I was fortunate enough to find individuals living on eight streets—four main and four side streets—willing to participate in my study. Out of the twelve, six residents lived and participated in *lijan* on side streets, while the other half were from larger streets. I kept with, but added to, their definitions of side and main streets. Mohie El Din St., Lebanon St., and Gamaet el Dowwal St. are important for their size and relative location, cutting through three neighborhoods: Dokki, Mohandeseen, and Bulaq al Daqrur (a neighborhood often designated as “lower class”). Geziret El Arab St., on the other hand, is roughly the same size as Iran St., which I categorize as a side street. Yet, I designate the former as a main street because of its symbolic importance as one of the main commercial centers in the Mohandeseen-Dokki area. A main street, then, is defined not simply by its length, or by how wide it is, but by its relative political, social, or economic importance when compared to other streets. Finally, the dynamic between side and main streets, like other aspects of the *lijan*, changed as the groups became more routinized.

In this section, I revisit how the different “types” of streets could affect the lijan’s formation and evolution (see “Degrees of Familiarization” in part II). I begin by describing the spatial, aesthetic, and symbolic importance of each street and this affected the lijan narrative. Next, I provide a more in-depth analysis and add to the differences between main and side streets lijan. While I find it important to distinguish between the social processes that occurred on each type of street, I will demonstrate in this section and the next that side and main streets often depended on one another. Quite frequently, events on main streets affected practices on side streets. In part, this is due to the fluidity of residents’ participation across multiple lijan, a topic I focus on in the next section. For now, I will address the key differences in participants’ experiences on side and main streets throughout the 15 days of the lijan.

3.1.1 The Street Examined

A concrete description long overdue, it would be difficult to tell the story of the lijan without appreciating what was perhaps the most visceral aspect for participants: the physical and aesthetic dimensions of the street. Larger streets in this study—Mohie El Din St., Gamaet el dowwal St., Lebanon St., and Geziret El Arab St.—have one thing in common: their importance as economic centers of Mohandeseen and Dokki, two neighborhoods considered upscale by most Cairenes. Out of the four, Geziret El Arab St. (450 meters in length) is perhaps the most famous for its commercial component. The street is *almost entirely* comprised of American and European designer stores, such as Calvin Klein, Pull & Bear, and Burberry. This, according more than one of my interviewees, was the primary reason for the spectacular wave of looting that occurred on the street during the 28th. With its u-shaped form (see map), street visibility was severely limited for participants dispersed across different checkpoints along the street. Lebanon

St. (700m), Mohie El Din St. (1400m), and Gamaet el Dowwal St. (2000m), on the other hand, are wide (the latter more so than former two) and straight. They too are commercial, though one could find a dramatically more diverse selection of restaurants, private businesses, retail stores, and financial buildings than on Geziret El Arab St. Yet, Lebanon St. and Mohie El Din St. are known both as residential and commercial streets, equally. Overall, the four main streets represent economic and social centers of the two neighborhoods.

The remaining streets are almost entirely residential, though almost every street in the Mohandeseen and Dokki area contains some convenient, electronic, and retail stores. Iran St. (1000m), although larger than Lebanon St., is narrower, and hardly important to daily commutes, business transactions, or any other social activities. Tiba Street (300m), the second smallest of the streets, is notable for its close proximity to the Shooting Club, an elite sport and social institution that costs roughly 150,000 Egyptian pounds to join (Shawky et al., 2012). The relevance of this club to the Tiba St. *lijan* cannot be emphasized enough, since many of its residents were club members who not only owned firearms, but were also experienced shooters. All this made their *lijan* uniquely prepared for the conflicts they would soon face. Residents on Hussein Ahmed Rashad St. (250m), the smallest of the eight streets, would affectively mobilize for different reasons. Most distinguishable about this side street was the important role of the mosque during the *lijan*'s formation. Despite minor differences, the side streets are unlikely to be known by outsiders, unlike the larger, more economically symbolic streets. Yet it would be these narrower, more residential streets that would innovate some of the most impressive practices.

3.1.2 Side and Main: Initial experiences

The physical, aesthetic, and symbolic aspects of the street affected shaped the lijan narrative from the very beginning. Even on the 28th, we can observe a difference between side and main street experiences. Initial experiences with theft were more common among residents of larger, more commercial streets. Main streets bore the brunt of the consequences not simply because they were larger; as economic symbols of the neighborhood, they presumably appeared the most attractive for plundering. If the dominative narrative were true, then the Interior ministry's strategy to instill fear among the general population would be effective only if the most visible of public spaces were targeted. Sure enough, the looting and destruction of retail stores on Geziret El Arab St., Shehab St., and others, was televised on private and government-sponsored networks. Among my twelve interview participants, the most frequently cited theft on the 28th occurred on the larger streets: RadioShack (Mohie el Din St.), the Duty Free store (Gamaet El Dowwal St.), and Armories Fathalla (Gamaet El Dowwal St.). The complete destruction of property on Shehab St., only two blocks away from Geziret El Arab St., also became a popular story during the Day of Anger. The sense of anxiety this instilled, and the subsequent decision to go down to the streets to "see for oneself," one participant told me, was tied to these events. On side streets, the experience was at least one degree removed.

On Tiba St., two lijan participants did, indeed, witness individuals passing by with guns, but the target remained away from home: Armories Fathalla, the local gun shop, was on Gamaet El Dowwal St. Residents on side streets, although close in proximity to violence and theft, only observed the consequences. None of the residents interviewed from side streets mentioned theft on their own street, but they did bring up (more than once) conflicts on other streets and even neighborhoods. Presumably, these differences—between residents' initial experiences on side

and main streets—affected the early decisions of participants. For example, one may speculate whether main street residents decided to stand, first, in front of their own apartment buildings and only later at checkpoints after these events. After all, suspicious individuals, according to them, had *already* attacked properties on their block and it was reasonable for them to believe that they would next try to enter apartment buildings. Still, it would be difficult to make such a firm conclusion since smaller department stores did exist on side streets. What is important, here, is the symbolic significance of larger streets, how this made them the primary targets of the state-sponsored criminal activity, and how it might have affected the perceptions and early decisions of lijan participants on both types of streets.

3.1.3 Emerging differences

Four factors were unique to the side streets in my study: (1) the role of the mosque and, specifically, the muezzin in calling residents to action; (2) the role of the doormen, or *Bawabeen*, in notifying and gathering residents from their apartment buildings; (3) the insulation of side streets by larger streets; and (4) the quick familiarization process that led lijan participants to stray away from the immediate vicinity of their home and stand at major intersections where side and main streets intersect. Previously, I demonstrated how these differences affected the mobilization process and establishment of new relationships on side streets. Here, I further analyze the four differences and how at least three of these four were specific to side streets.

The role of the mosque in mobilizing residents makes the lijan on Hussein Ahmed Rashad St. unique. On the 29th, a muezzin announced, through a loudspeaker, the imminent dangers that residents were about to confront. He called on them to come down to protect their cars, homes, and family. Throughout the 15 days, the mosque continued its call to action,

especially as the number of participants dwindled. Tiba St. residents also noted similar practices of the muezzin.

The main streets in this study did have several mosques, but never once was there a similar call to mobilize nor was there even a general announcement of the potential dangers on the street. There are at least two reasons that the mosque's role in mobilizing was entirely absent in the larger streets in this study. First, major streets had several mosques, but none of which were separated from apartment or office buildings. The mosque was neither physically nor symbolically central to the more commercial streets. One participant tells me of a neighborhood in the outskirts of Cairo, *El-Tagamu El Khames*, where a large central mosque could be heard from practically all streets in the neighborhood. The mosques on the main streets in my study, however, were limited to smaller ones that were part of residential buildings. Second, the size of the street, its length and its width, could make it difficult for one muezzin to communicate effectively to residents. Even without the confusion that could have emerged if multiple mosques began making announcements simultaneously, it is unlikely that participants on the main streets, especially a U-shaped one like Geziret El Arab St., could audibly make out the muezzin's words. It is likely that the mosque, as a potential mobilizing mechanism, was present only in places where effective communication between the muezzin and residents could occur.

Although Tiba St. lijan heard the calls of the muezzin as well, it was preceded by earlier announcements made by doormen of individual apartment buildings. Doormen play a unique role in Egyptian culture. Their duty consists of more than receiving guests. Some deliver goods, such as food or day-to-day necessities, to their residents upon request. More relevant here is the defensive role that doormen take on: they are responsible for protecting the residents of their building. And more often than not, the doorman *lives* in a quasi-public courtyard or hallway way

in front of or inside the residential building. A doorman, then, need not be altruistic in his intentions; his incentive to protect and notify residents of a looming danger may very well be the fact that, in the event of an intrusion, he would be the first to meet the potential suspect, endangering his personal wellbeing and that of his family. He is as much of a resident as those who live in the floors that tower over him, regardless of the gaping economic and social disparities. Perhaps this is one reason why, after hearing about the rampant theft, the doorman of a Tiba St. apartment building called on his residence, through the intercom system, to come down and protect their building with any weapons they had. Yet, it is *unclear*, to me, why this occurred on Tiba St. and none of the larger street. There seems to be no specific quality of the bawwab of a side street that should distinguish him from one on a larger street. For this reason, the difference can only be observed; I do not suggest that the role of the doorman is inherently different on side streets; simply that this was the case among the eight streets I studied.

Unlike the role of the doormen, residents' decisions to stand not in front of their homes, but at the checkpoints of major intersection was a development that was *exclusive* to the four side streets analyzed. Take the best two examples—Tiba St. and Hussein Ahmed Rashad St.—and their spatial layout: the two streets, unlike Iran and Abd El-Hameed Lotfy St., are surrounded at each end by a major street. More importantly, the absence of alleyways between each end reduces the number of potential entrance points for intruders. The decision to stand not in front of one's house, but instead to meet potential suspects at the major intersection emerged, at least in part, from the spatial layout of the two side streets. Main streets, on the other hand, had to face not only alleyways, but several major intersections as well. In the absence of a network of friends, family, or acquaintances, a resident on a major street could be expected to stand within the immediate vicinity of his home, at least until he establishes a network of trusted neighbors.

As networks of trust and friendship extended beyond one's street, however, these early social processes—of creating a network—changed, as did the experiences on each type of street.

3.1.4 Lijan develops: Diverging experiences

Although I will discuss the late lijn in the final section of this paper, it is important to at least mention key differences that emerged as the tanks rolled out onto the main streets. Some of the distinctions emerged early on, but became more relevant either because (a) the lijn became more routinized or (b) military presence affected the practices and perceived threat of theft. Yet, as I will demonstrate, the distinction between the two types of streets did not mean the two opposed or competed with one another.

Until now I have only discussed the experiences of the lijn participants, which in almost all cases were men in their 20s or 30s. When asking interviewees about the role of women in the lijn and the possible theories on why they did not go down to the streets, I was told that they “did not belong,” or “would not know how to handle the weapons.” The critique provides a glimpse of how participants viewed the lijn: *if you were not physically present in the street, you were considered to have no role*. On some streets, however, this was not the case. Early on, and at a time when most communication networks were down, women would announce the latest developments in Tahrir from their balconies. Such information could have fostered solidarity between demonstrators in Tahrir and residents in the lijn. Women also provided food, sweets, and tea to men at checkpoints—usually delivered by children. On main streets however, “there were simply too many men and too wide streets to send down anything.” The size of most main streets made the role of women even less visible. I say less visible since women may have had an influence “behind the scenes.” Though my male interview participants did not discuss this, it

should be the subject of future research.¹¹ In my study, I only recorded one woman (Tiba St.) participating in lijan activity (see “Sharing Stories, Experiences, And Rumors”). But the overwhelming majority of women were limited to serving tea and food, as well as announcing, to the streets, the developments in Tahrir.

The presence of formal shifts and their announcements was also unique to side, and usually smaller, streets. Older participants on Tiba St. were able to gather residents on the 29th and establish a formal shift system, consisting of two shifts, one in the evening and another overnight. Overlap between the earlier and later shifts ensured that residents from each would discuss who would stand at checkpoint the following day. Elders, however, did allow the younger participants to decide their own specific shifts among themselves. To a lesser extent, elders from Ahmad Rashad St. also designated shifts. Yet, it is important not to exaggerate the prevalence of these formal practices. Indeed my interview participant from the Ahmad Rashad St. lijan told me, “we had more than enough people on the street...but if the telephone rang and there was a rumor that trouble was approaching us...we would drop everything and go to our posts.” Yet, all of the participants on the *main streets* told me that no such system existed in their lijan. Elders, in fact, would often sit on sidewalks drinking tea and conversing, less frequently standing at the checkpoints.

Perhaps the most important distinction already hinted at was the presence of the army on main streets. Tanks and foot soldiers were deployed as early as the 28th (Geziret El Arab St.), but, for the most part, arrived two days later at major intersections, such as the one between Gamaet El Dowwal St. and Mohie El Din St. Residents on side streets, on the other hand, would

¹¹ There are, of course, exceptional cases where women did participate in the lijan. For example, women were reportedly present on the streets and checkpoints in Zamalek—an upper class neighborhood often dismissed for not having “true” lijan since their island was sealed off by in order to protect its large foreign population.

have to travel to nearby lijan to see the tanks rolling in. Although the sounds of the tanks were reported and commented on by the residents of the side street lijan, the physical absence of soldiers would affect their practices. Most commonly, side streets faced considerable difficulty when trying to deal with captured suspects. With police refusing to take in suspects, army personnel became the de facto authority figures. On Mohie El Din St. (main), for example, army officers would be called to pick up any potential suspects. Side streets, however, learned how to deal with intruders as they encountered them. Once on Ahmad Rashad St., for example, intruders came speeding in on motorcycles, prompting residents to fire their weapons. Unfortunately, as the motorcycle approach the middle of the street, residents from opposite ends aimed and fired at each other; no injuries were reported. Following this incident, residents decided not to “shoot first and ask questions later.” On Tiba St., we find a similar story. After shooting a suspect’s motorcycle, residents were clueless as to how to actually “deal” with the individual. In the end, they tied him up to a tree until they could locate a military officer to come in and deal with the suspect. Unlike the main streets, whose residents had several face-to-face interactions with the military, side streets were neglected, becoming a space absent of official authority.

Military attention and support, however helpful it may have been, did not foster hostility between the more strategic, usually larger streets and the smaller, more residential ones. On the contrary, the residents from both types of streets seemed to exchange information about the most recent crimes, provide each other with advice, and offer assistance to one another. In fact, residents of smaller streets would often receive their information about approaching trouble from the main streets. Participants from both types of streets congregated at the intersections, and sometimes created a checkpoint with members from both streets. We saw this with Tiba St. and

Gamaet el Dowwal St.; Ahmad Rashad St. and Masadaq St.; and, to a lesser extent, Iran and Mohie El Din. St.

The non-competitive atmosphere among the *lijan* was possible for at least two reasons. First, territorialism certainly played its role in fostering defensive attitudes on each street, but as we will see below, this created a tension only between upscale and popular neighborhoods (*manatiq sha'biyya*). Second, and related to the first reason, is the fact that it was understood, by side street residents, that the decision to occupy the larger streets was a *strategic* move by the military (recall that it was the main streets, with their department and electronic stores, international franchises, and banks that were the main targets of looting). In fact, Waleed (Tiba St.) took pride in the learning process that occurred in the absence of military presence. Residents on side streets, rather than feel envious of the attention given to the main streets, took pride in their more noticeable unity, (somewhat) formalized tactics, and creative solutions.

It is important not to exaggerate the experiences across main and smaller streets. “Every street had their own thing...[Residents] protected their own street in a particular way,” one participant and resident on Mohie El Din St. reminds me. What I have hoped to counter here are the overgeneralizations of previous scholars who believe that *the* major distinction is between *lijan* in popular versus upscale neighborhoods (Bremer 2011). Accounting for *lijan* in both types of neighborhoods is, of course, crucial. But the story of the *lijan* reveals that its essence lies in the subtleties. By looking at different “types” of streets—side and main—we can perhaps see trends *across* neighborhoods with different social and economic makeup. This would prevent us

from reifying the notion that popular neighborhoods are outliers in every respect.¹² Even within a single neighborhood, residents from side and main streets experienced and engaged in somewhat different social processes. Early on, the violence and theft that residents on main streets witnessed first-hand was but a story for most residents on side streets. As threats and rumors inundated the streets with a sense of anxiety, mobilization processes in our two types of streets seemed to diverge. The military presence on some streets and not others, as well as the routinization of practices, continued to render each street's *lijan* unique during the last few days of their existence. Yet, these differences were limited by the checkpoints at each end of the street. More often than not, residents who had the courage and curiosity to travel to other *lijan* could have both experiences.

3.2 COMMUNICATION METHODS AND THE PROCESS OF ROAMING

Mainstream and intellectual debates, concerning the role of technology during the revolution, have largely ignored how ordinary Egyptians communicated during and after the communications blackout (Herrera 2012; Lim 2012). I do not wish to contribute to this debate by simply stating that the Egyptian revolution was or was *not* tweeted; the polarizing dimensions of this argument have already been dismissed (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Sakr 2013). In this section, I focus on how participants communicated with (a) other residents (and family members)

¹² Although such research is invaluable, scholars studying popular neighborhoods emphasize their distinguishing characteristics and often ignore their relationship with other neighborhoods (Singerman 2009). This is problematic for a number of reasons. Most importantly, popular neighborhoods boast a population arguably more socioeconomically diverse than most scholars studying the subject would like to admit. In a number of informal conversations during my visit, one Egyptian living in Mohandeseen tells me that there are even millionaires in Imbaba, a popular committee. Understanding the relationship between the two is often more productive and a more *realistic* approach to the *lijan* story.

on their street, (b) lijan participants on other streets and in nearby neighborhoods, and (c) military and police officers that occupied checkpoints. Finally, I end by briefly discussing the role that *miscommunication* played. As with other sections, communication methods varied across location and time. Main and side streets will again have their differences, as will the early versus late lijan. Throughout the 15 days of the lijan, residents constantly altered their channels and methods of communicating. The remarkably creative techniques that Egyptians used to communicate with one another during the 15 days of the lijan were, in part, responses to the actions of the state. My central aim, here, is to trace the development of communication channels over time. Using this approach, I argue that the relationship between a group and particular tools, such as Facebook and twitter, is rarely static across a group's life.

3.2.1 Communication within the lijan

Most of the methods and tools that residents used to interact with one another have already been mentioned in the preceding sections. Here, however, we can focus on how these social processes developed. January 28th was not only a day of incredible neighborhood conflict; it was also the first day of a national mobile and media blackout (Richtel 2011). The plan was orchestrated by the Mubarak regime in order to break up mobilization networks. In the end, the plan failed at preventing Egyptians in Tahrir and back home from communicating with one another. Still, the blackout—that lasted until the 31st—had a considerable effect on the early communication tactics of lijan participants.

Lijan participants' initial mobilization depended on their ability to effectively communicate with one another. The process by which residents were notified of looming dangers varied across the different streets and neighborhoods. Recall the important role of apartment

intercom systems and mosque loudspeakers. When Waleed and his doorman used the intercom to report the theft of a nearby gun shop, Fathalla, they were calling the lijan into action. Similarly, the muezzin's call, on both Tiba St. and Ahmad Rashad St., marked the first time that residents on both streets had heard the phrase, "lijan sha'biyya." While some believed that it was the military that called on people, during a televised announcement, to go down into the streets, it would be difficult to verify the influence that such a call had on ordinary Egyptians during early mobilization. What is not difficult to observe is the presence of local actors, such as the muezzin and doorman, and their role in bringing residents down into the streets.

Communicating with other residents was often the first step towards creating checkpoints. Previously, I mentioned several methods by which residents slowly established a network of trusted acquaintances. Residents most often communicated by word-of-mouth, using phrases like "Ishah" (wake up!) and "Ilhaa" ("Go after him/her/them!") to alert residents at other checkpoints of the approaching dangers. Eventually, residents were able to spread the message not only to other checkpoints on the same street, but also to other streets. While the "wake up" call was mostly used during late hours of the night, to keep participants awake, "watch out" was more commonly used for immediate (perceived) dangers. If, for example, a car were approaching an individual checkpoint, members of that checkpoint would yell out "watch out!" to keep participants at other checkpoints alert. It was also common for individuals standing in the nearby vicinity to run towards the checkpoint that was closest to the outsider.

Word-of-mouth techniques went beyond alerting participants of immediate dangers. Individuals also exchanged rumors, stories, and debates about the events in Tahrir. One participant insists that these methods of communication were precisely what kept younger and older participants in dialogue with one another. Such discussions, however, were not limited to

participants. Those who chose not to leave the home or were barred from joining the *lijan* would sometimes shout the most recent national developments and rumors from balconies. Unable to use the Internet or cell phones, residents made face-to-face conversations their primary method of interaction on the streets.

For most streets, mobile networks were restored on January 29th, though the Internet would not be restored until the 31st. During the blackout, residents had sometimes used landlines to call friends and acquaintances prior to going down to the streets. “We went back to the days of grade school, where we would call our friends on our home phones,” one participant tells me. After communication systems were restored, however, cell phones became another method of communication, especially to participants on opposite ends of the street. Youssef, a resident of Mohie El Din St., for example, tells me that individuals would often call up a friend at other checkpoints if they intended to visit them. Phone calls, although not necessary, eased the flow of transportation when residents were on high alert.

Finally, there were a series of nonverbal techniques that were used to distinguish insiders from outsiders. Individuals on Tiba St., Ahmad Rashad St., and Geziret al Arab St. would often tie colored pieces of cloth around their arm as to quickly designate their status as an official resident. Individuals would also wear signs across their chest designating themselves as “the people’s” security guards. At other times, signs would be used on the *outsiders*. Recall the technique used on cars that wanted to pass through the street. As the vehicle went from one checkpoint to another, they would be marked with a signature known by all other checkpoints. For example, participants at the checkpoint #1 would lift up a windshield wiper so that checkpoints #2, #3, and #4 would know (a) that they had already been checked by another checkpoint on the street, and (b) which direction they were coming from. Each individual

checkpoint had their signature “move” or marker by which they would designate the vehicles of outsiders.

3.2.2 Communication Across Lijan

Perhaps the most important characteristic of the liján is its fluid “membership.” In this section, I focus on the quality and channels of interaction across these liján. Lijan participants, to be sure, were proud to represent their streets—evidenced by the aforementioned street specific signs. Yet, by the third day of the liján’s existence (January 30th), most members had traveled and visited friends. Again, we see similar communication tools—the use of landlines, cell phones, and word-of-mouth (“wake up” and “watch out”)—being used between residents of different streets. When I asked my interviewees what the “average” day looked like *after* the military had arrived, most told me that they would first look to the streets to see if people were standing at checkpoints. If the streets seemed sufficiently occupied, participants would then proceed to call friends in *other* streets and neighborhoods. Indeed, by the end, many checkpoints consisted of longtime friends from a number of different streets and even neighborhoods.

Friends and families began calling each other on landlines on the 28th. Moaatez, for example, told me that prior to first joining the liján, he called his friends to check up on them and ask if they would be participating in their own liján. As fear subsided and the liján became a routine part of everyday life, individuals would use cell phones and landlines to ask where their respective group of friends were meeting up that day. Upon meeting, friends would stand at checkpoints and patrol streets that were not their own. A second way residents from different streets interacted with one another was by sending messengers, usually children or young teens, that would ask whether other liján required any assistance or knew of any impending dangers.

What makes the lijan of later days unique was this process of roaming. By moving beyond one's street and standing at a friend's checkpoint one was able to transcend the narrow territorialism that was once confined to individual streets. Now, lijan became more lax in their checkpoint activities, so long as residents were from that neighborhood. One resident even told me that this allowed him to visit friends in Tahrir more often. This is, of course, not to refute earlier differences between side and main streets. For the most part, the former type of street was relatively more insulated. That is, residents of side streets that I interviewed did not stray far beyond their own street, even during the last days of the lijan. In general, however, the lijan had become a fluid phenomenon with communication channels cutting across entire neighborhoods.

3.2.3 Communicating with Police and Army Officials

After the first three days of heightened anxiety, communication extended not only beyond the individual street level, but also to the military and police officers now occupying strategic checkpoints across the city. Even during the early days of the lijan, some officers who were residents of a street would offer their walkie-talkies as a tool to communicate with the local police department. During the blackout, this was a highly valuable method of contacting officers to pick up suspects. Only on Geziret El Arab St. were walkie-talkies used by non-officials to communicate. For most streets, military officers became a quick ally at the very least for their communication channels. Residents on Mohie el Din St., Geziret El Arab St., Tiba St., and Gamaet El Dowwal St. also exchanged personal cell phone numbers with army generals posted in nearby checkpoints. When running into conflicts with outsiders, Kareem, a resident on Gamaet El Dowwal St., would call his military contact to come and resolve the issue. Of course, residents were also able to have face-to-face interaction with these state officials. On Ahmad

Rashad St., for example, Bassem was able to socialize with younger foot soldiers posted at a major checkpoint. Like communication between residents within and across lijan, interaction with military and police officers was often possible through several channels.

3.2.4 Miscommunication

Despite the number of ways residents and non-residents could communicate with each other, the early days of the lijan were marked by *miscommunication*. Here, I would like to demonstrate why the aforementioned communication processes, techniques, and tools became important ways to indicate that one “belonged” to a lajna.

The most common ways of communicating during the initial days of the lijan—word-of-mouth, using landlines, and sending messengers—were not completely effective. Indeed, it was often how rumors and “false alarms” rapidly diffused across entire neighborhoods. Even more problematic was the treatment that the earliest participants received when they attempted to communicate with their neighbors, calling on them to join the lijan. “They thought [that] *we* were thieves,” Youssef tells me in disbelief, “they threw bottles and cursed at us!” Communicating the *idea* of the lijan was not always a simple process. In fact, all of my interviewees had heard the name “lajan sha’biyya” only *after* the neighborhood groups had emerged. Another one of my participants was stopped at gunpoint, while approaching his street by car. When asking what the problem was, they told him that individuals were reportedly seen shooting an automatic machine gun out of the same car just minutes before he had appeared at this checkpoint. After calling friends on the street to vouch for him, the individual’s residence was confirmed.

Communication processes, from the beginning, needed to be refined. We cannot isolate the use of landlines, cell phones, word-of-mouth (face-to-face), or any communication “tool” as *the* defining mode of interaction in the lijan. Even as one of my interviewees insists that Facebook and twitter “only provided pictures and videos, and not much more,” it would be unwise to dismiss the role of social media tools altogether. Here, I have hoped to explain an alternative approach: to understand the processes by which individuals communicated *throughout* the 15 days. As the lijan developed, participants found themselves communicating in new ways with friends and acquaintances beyond their original territory. Fluid “membership” allowed participants to quickly diffuse stories, rumors, and even tactics. It is difficult, then, to call any single lajna a “group” unless we define it as a dynamic, but amorphous body of roaming individuals seeking to learn from other lijan.

3.3 LEARNING FROM THE OTHER COMMITTEES

Residents’ decisions to travel to different streets explains not only why they were, *by the end*, very similar in their tactics and structure, but also why lijan within neighborhoods emerged almost simultaneously in such similar form. During the 28th and 29th, many observers acted within their immediate vicinity before knowing whether or not residents on other streets were reacting to the security vacuum in similar ways. “I had no idea that committees were appearing all over Cairo,” one resident from Tiba St. commented. How, then, did residents learn of other lijan? To fully answer the question, further research would need to focus on a specific neighborhood and try to locate the *origin* of an individual tactic or pinpoint precisely when an individual learned of other, nearby lijan. Yet, it is not clear that additional data could yield the

desired results. In fact, one risks missing the very point of the *lijan*—their fluidity, rapid emergence and adaptation to new situations, and creativity—if we approach their chronology with scientific rigidity, trying to find out *exactly* when the *lijan* idea and their tactics emerged. A much more interesting question would focus on processes: *how* did residents first hear about the *lijan* and *how* did they learn from each other’s practices? To answer the question, I return to the process of roaming and the changing tactics of *lijan*.

For residents curious enough, travelling to other streets was an early endeavor that was often rewarding. A resident on Tiba St., for example, recalls learning about formal checkpoints by walking to friends on Mohie el Din St. and Masadaq St. While the first few days called for more defensive approaches, resembling militaristic “front line” techniques, the Tiba St. *lijan* later adopted more formalized checkpoints. Instead of having a line of armed men waiting for you at a checkpoint, Tiba St. and Lebanon St. began using passwords and checking state I.D. cards to verify one’s supposed residence. Another resident, from Geziret El Arab St., learned about the different ways *lijan* participants manipulated cars as they passed from checkpoint to checkpoint. When asking whether they had learned anything from other *lijan*, my interviewees most frequently mentioned checkpoints and the practices attached to them (e.g., checking I.D.’s, asking for passwords, patting down individuals, using specific markers to identify suspects). After all, one must not forget that *lijan* literally translated into “checkpoints.”

It was often the smaller streets that learned from the main, more targeted streets. Yet, even the main streets borrowed from each other. Recall how *lijan* went from firing guns in the air, in an effort to keep residents alert or warn them of an approaching outsider, to yelling “wake up!” or “watch out!” In part, the switch came from a trial-and-error process learned internally. Yet, in the case of Geziret El Arab St.—a street that boasted having more weapons than any

other street in this study—one resident told me that he had learned from other lijan about the less confrontational approach of alerting residents. Residents learned not only from their own past mistakes, but from the development of nearby lijan as well.

Sometimes individuals would learn from other lijan while on their own street. Mentioned previously, it was quite common for friends to visit each other during the later days of the lijan. As time passed and fear subsided, the lijan's defensive measures became more lax. One consequence is that some participants began taking their duty at checkpoints less seriously. A resident from Geziret El Arab St., for example, explained how after standing for hours at a checkpoint, days after the 28th, he was approached by an outsider. When asking for identification, the outsider pulled out a gun from his back pocket and pointed it directly at the participant. He was stunned and paralyzed. "What's the point of having that weapon if you are not prepared to use it?" the outsider the participant asked quite critically. He continued talking to the two residents standing at the checkpoint, who, following this event, would always keep their weapon close by.

Of course, some of my interview respondents denied consciously learning any tactics from other lijan. Their responses, however, were less about arrogance. Instead, my interviewees genuinely believed that some aspects of the lijan emerged quite mysteriously and could not be explained empirically.¹³ Another respondent agreed that there must have been *some* tactics learned over the course of the 15 days, but that he could not identify a specific one. Even these few tactics were "mere suggestions," one resident from Mohie El Din St. tells me. Another participant from the same street was quite intimated *to teach others* the tactics he had learned during the first few days. Commenting on the Geziret El Arab St. lijan, he explains, "They had

¹³ One participant even told me that he did his own research weeks after the lijan had demobilized and had simply given up in trying to find where the phrase "lijan sha'biyya" was picked up.

so many weapons, that I was actually shocked and scared [to approach them]...they didn't need our help."

Whether conscious or not, tactics that were learned across the lijan were the result of processes of roaming and trial-and-error. Main and side street lijan learned and adopted tactics at different times. Those willing to visit friends during the earlier days of the lijan claimed to have brought some of the tactics home. Others were "taught a lesson" standing at their own checkpoint. Even those who claimed not to have intentionally learned from other lijan suggested at least the *possibility* of some cross-fertilization of ideas. After all, these ideas, as we will see, were sometimes presented less explicitly.

3.4 SHARING STORIES, EXPERIENCES, AND RUMORS

Communication among residents went beyond explicit recommendations to adopt new practices, keeping each other alert, and notifying officials to seize suspects. The lijan sha'biyya can be seen as more than just a set of relationships, networks, practices, and objectives; they are remembered, by participants, not as a collection of groups, but of stories of ordinary Egyptians during the first 18 days of the revolution. Breaking apart the organizational structural is one way to understand the lijan; collecting the vignettes, one character and story at a time, is another. Sharing stories, experiences, and rumors became *the central* mode of interaction across lijan all over Cairo. "It kept the energy of the lijan," a Tiba St. resident tells me. Stories were exchanged among lijan participants, their families, demonstrators in Tahrir, and state authorities. Whether or not individuals strategically and consciously chose to tell particular stories at specific moments,

these narratives developed a life of their own. When combined, these stories can be seen as a reflection of the lijan narrative itself, capturing factual events, emotions, and attitudes of the individuals who experienced them.

The novelty and uncertainty that marked the early days of the lijan were captured by the stories told by its residents. The very origin of the lijan is comprised of a contested set of rumors. In the most popularly accepted narrative, which more than one of my interviewees insisted was *the* true story, the birth of the lijan was a direct result of the Ministry of Interior's intentional strategy to instill chaos into millions of Cairenes by opening up the prisons, disrupting communication channels, televising nationwide riots and plundering, and ordering police to remain in their homes. Of course, the plan backfired. Another version of the story suggests that the instigators were actually *baltagiyya* that were not released from prisons, but hired by the state. The perceived enemy, here, comes not from behind prison bars, but from the neglected alleyways of Egypt's popular neighborhoods. A third narrative resembles the second story, though it rejects any state involvement in the crimes that occurred on January 28th, the Day of Anger. Important, here, is not whether we can verify these rumors, but how they contributed to subsequent actions of lijan participants. One resident insisted that the very existence of these rumors, if created by the state, were one of the main reasons he went down to join the lijan. Other responses followed the same general logic: "The state told us not to go down to the streets and to Tahrir because of the *haramiyyeen* [thieves]. So we said 'you don't want us to go down? Ok, we are going down then.'"

Rumors would move beyond the Day of Anger and run parallel to the lijan throughout its 15 days, providing a reflection of the phenomenon. Fear and rumors emerged simultaneously, during the early days of the lijan, and mutually reinforced one another. While initial rumors may

have helped motivate individuals to go down into the street—though, to be sure, this is only one factor that may have contributed to the initial mobilization—later stories would help organize residents into defense groups.

The decision to act based off of a rumor, however, depended on the perceived legitimacy of the *source*. On main streets, the most legitimate sources were often high-ranking military officers who, by then, occupied the major checkpoints. Residents perceived these officials as having “insider” knowledge about potential attacks on the lijan. A resident from Gamaet el Dowwal St., for example, describes a rumor told to him by a general, occupying a nearby checkpoint, as “one of the scariest moments,” he had experienced since the 28th:

The officer approached the resident, who was known for solving the major conflicts on Gamaet el Dowwal St., and notified him that a train full of released prisoners were approaching Mohandeseen and would pass along Sudan St. (see train tracks by the intersection of Sudan St. and Gamaet El Dowwal St. on map). “Tell anyone you know to come down to the streets and to bring all the weapons they have with them,” the officer told him. Residents of Gamaet el Dowwal St., according to this individual, did exactly that. Within the hour, lijan participants were being directed, *by the military officer*, to specific locations of the street. “Of course, the train never came,” the resident tells me.

On Mohie El Din St. this same rumor circulated, only the prisoners were now arriving on a bus instead of a train. Despite the proven ability of residents to organize their own lijan, participants were deeply affected by rumors from “official sources,” and rapidly organized in response to the sometimes-falsifiable stories.

As fear subsided and the lijan became more fluid and routine in its structure and practices, stories told by residents began to reflect the humor that now filled the streets. Among the most well known of these more light-hearted rumors was the always-approaching Kia Cerato, one of the more popular sedans driven by Egyptians. At least one resident *from every street in this study* mentioned the Kia Cerato or immediately recalled the rumor if I asked explicitly. Each

time, my interviewees told this story they began with an uncontained laugh. “One moment the Kia would be red,” a Mohie el Din St. resident tells me, “but in five minutes we would be told that the Kia was now white.” During the last few days of the *lijan*, rumors of the vehicle were entirely dismissed. By mentioning this rumor, I do not mean to dismiss the substantive role that these stories had on the *lijan*’s practices. Rather, rumors often reflected—and sometimes reinforced—the mood of the streets; as fear subsided, the stories told were less dramatic.

The importance of storytelling goes well beyond hearsay. Seen as a social process, storytelling became an early way for residents to both pass the time, during the late shifts, and foster unity within the *lijan*. Most importantly, it was a process by which older participants were able to tell stories from the past. These tales varied in depth and tone, and dealt with a range of topics that could involve anything from past wars (e.g., October Wars) to personal stories. Storytelling became among the most important methods of communication, offering practical advice, humor, and historical significance to the younger participants, who now had their own story to live out.

With a researcher asking questions, my interviewees were now eager to tell me their own stories. One resident from Tiba St. told me of his tale: “the woman with the shotgun.” The narrative was based on his experience of the only female *lijan* participant on his street (and possibly in the entire Mohandeseen-Dokki). The following is a passage, an excerpt from my field notes, of his story:

While on his usual shift outside his father’s store, Waleed heard 10 gunshots and heard “gather, gather!” instead of the usual cautionary gunshots. The elders told the younger residents on patrol to go check out what the problem was. Waleed and a few others went down the block to discover two people on the ground staring into space and motionless. Beside the two people was a small Chinese motorcycle that they came in on. Eyewitnesses explained that the outsiders were knocked off their bike by the only woman that was seen in Waleed’s *lajna*. It turns out that her whole family went on patrol and that the woman and her husband

practiced target shooting, regularly at the nearby Shooting Club. She was in her mid 30s. Waleed found out that one of the outsiders sped by her checkpoint shooting upwards, into the sky. In response, the woman with the shotgun, fired near their feet so that the pellets would ricochet and hit into their bikes...After tying the two men down, a man dressed in plain clothes told the residents that he was a police officer and could call some friends to pick up the suspects. The residents accepted the request.

Waleed, my interviewee, could have told me any one of the stories that made up the lijan narrative. Like any storyteller, he chose this story to communicate specific lessons and themes he believed to be crucial to the larger narrative. For one, his story is an example of remarkable agency, one that describes a civilian “courageously policing” her streets. Even more important, Waleed almost certainly told me this story because of its exceptionality: women were practically “invisible” in the streets during the 15 days of the lijan. By telling the tale of “the woman with the shotgun,” Waleed was able to give a concrete example of a female resident’s contribution to the lijan, while stressing the value of experience having experienced participants.

By the final days of the lijan, storytelling had become *the* central activity. One resident tells me, quite proudly, that upon visiting his friends in Tahrir Square, he was often asked to share his stories of the lijan. Indeed, for some of my interviewees, sharing stories about their own street became a routine part of the day. One resident on Abd El-Hameed Lotfy St., for example, tells me how he would exchange lijan stories at a café every morning, prior to standing at checkpoints. Some interviewees even insisted that these stories were more commonly discussed than “politics.” While many disagreed with this claim, it reveals the significance of storytelling during the lijan’s 15 days of existence.

Storytelling was much more than a way to pass the time. The proliferation of rumors, most of which featured potential baltagiyya coming from remote areas, provided an incentive for

resident to go down to the streets. When coming from “legitimate” sources, these stories would affect lijan practices. Other times, however, rumors reflected the humor and banality of the late lijan. Aside from rumors, storytelling became a powerful social tool that fostered solidarity and interaction across age groups. With the gift of storytelling passed down to them, younger participants were able to remember the lijan with their own repertoire of narratives, carefully choosing to tell me specific stories and presumably leaving out others. These stories circulated across streets and entire neighborhoods, together contributing to the larger narrative of the lijan. Yet, as we will see in the following subsection, while these stories empowered some—most often participants within the lijan—they targeted others, designating them as enemies.

3.5 ESTABLISHING THE ENEMY: THE IDEA OF THE BALTAGY AND ITS EXCEPTIONS

In describing the whirlwind of blame that followed the May 2011 church attacks in Imbaba, a popular neighborhood in Cairo, Adel Iskandar (2011) problematized the phrase *baltagiyya*:

“Christians accused Salafis, and baltageya (thugs), Salafis accused Christians and baltageya, SCAF condemned the baltageya, the government said it will take decisive action against Muslim and Christian baltageya. In a span of 24 hours everyone in Egypt was a likely baltagy, from the urban poor to Coptic Pope Shenouda. But the real question is whom did the baltageya accuse? So I went on a quest to locate a baltagy to get his opinion. Sadly, I learned that the baltageya have no office, no phone number, no representatives, no websites, no email addresses, no Facebook profiles or twitter feeds (spoofs aside). No one has come forward to admit being a member of this elite force of divisiveness. So there is no one to speak for the baltageya. *This is because they have no names, faces or leaders.* So who are these invisible baltageya that seem to pose such a major threat to the contiguity of the Egyptian revolution?”

Baltagiyya is a term that was socially constructed and embedded in everyday discourse of Egyptians long before 2011. With its Turkish origins, baltagiyya literally translates into ‘he who bears an axe.’ Yet, if Iskandar’s account reveals anything it is that Egyptians have used the term with incredible, but highly dangerous flexibility. Although he focuses on the post-2011 use of the term, Iskandar begins by explaining the role of baltagiyya during the revolution. He recalls, “during the 18 days...the term that was a weapon in the hands of the regime’s opponents was being hijacked by the government to characterize the protesters” (2011). Yet, Iskandar, like many other scholars writing in 2011 takes the events of Tahrir Square and uses them to generalize about Egyptian society as a whole. In large part, lijan participants used the term to describe *both* state-hired thugs *and* independent criminals. In fact, the difference between two types of baltagiyya relates more to the origins and motivations of suspected thugs—that is, whether or not they are hired by the state to do its “dirty work”—and less with how these suspects are treated when they receive the title of baltagy by participants standing at checkpoints. In the minds of the lijan, the baltagiyya can be visually identified, thus rendering the story of the origins of the baltagiyya irrelevant (so long as it retains its negative connotation).

In this section, I hope to problematize, as did Iskandar, the term baltagiyya in all its elusiveness. Constructed by the state, but perpetuated by its everyday use among the general public, the term baltagiyya gains incredible importance during the 15 days of the lijan. I begin by briefly describing the importance of baltagiyya during the formation of the lijan, but quickly move to how the term was used by participants to perpetuate the stereotype of the baltagy as coming from a lower class neighborhood. Since the term has been in use for decades, lijan participants were well aware of what a baltagiyya “looks like.” To make this explicit, I create a basic physical profile of the baltagy as participants constructed him. Finally, I reveal the

contradictions in the actual treatment of baltagiyya and how, in practice, the negative connotation loses some of its power. Its nimble definition made baltagiyya a convenient term to describe an unknown “other” in times of great confusion and uncertainty. Simultaneously and interrelated, it solidified the neighborhood-level territorialism that was essential to the early days of the lijan.

3.5.1 Creation of an Enemy? Early Practices of the Baltagiyya

Before dissecting the role of the baltagiyya—as an abstract concept used to distinguish insiders and outsiders—let us briefly review the importance of the category when discussing the birth of the lijan. On the 28th, with rumors running high and televised reports of looting, official media sources and residents were quick to create an image of the suspected criminals: they were either (a) hired by the state or released from prisons to instill chaos, or (b) acting independently and simply taking advantage of a security vacuum. Regardless of the narrative that one chose to believe, the final image of the enemy was the same. If the baltagy was hired by the state, the logic went, the thug-to-be must have originally been recruited from one of Egypt’s poorer neighborhoods. He was likely to have little or no education and was therefore easily duped into helping the state in exchange of a meager salary. If the thug was acting independently, then we just cut the recruitment portion of this narrative out and we are left with the same conclusion: the source of the baltagy is necessarily attached specific neighborhoods in Cairo.

The geographic positioning of Mohandeseen and Dokki—our two neighborhoods under analysis—are particularly important to the idea of the geographically bounded definition of the baltagy. Even on the first day, the 28th, future participants of Mohandeseen and Dokki lijan were well aware of their relative position to three popular neighborhoods surrounding them: *Bulaq al*

Daqrur to the west, *Mit Oqba* to north, and *Bein al-Sarayat* to the south. Each of the neighborhoods was generally associated with lower class, uneducated, and potentially dangerous portions of the population, despite the gross inaccuracy of such stereotypes. As *lijan* formed, this meant that participants knew *where* to expect danger. For example, a participant living on Gamaet el Dowwal St. told me that the most important and earliest checkpoint established was at the intersection of his street and Sudan St.—the intersection before the Bulaq Bridge (see map). The stereotype—of the *baltagy* coming from poorer neighborhoods—made people coming from the bridge instant suspects. On Mohie El din St., the southern portion of the street, bordering the smaller popular neighborhood of *Bein al-Sarayat*, became the location of potential *baltagiyya*. Future *lijan* participants on larger streets, for the most part, were able to identify one intersection or segment of the street as particularly vulnerable to *baltagiyya*.

After residents had located the “problematic” sections of the street, all they had to do was wait for their suspects. In a similar process, residents were also able to establish defense tactics based off of preconceived *visual* stereotypes of the *baltagy*. In this subsection, I explore the consequences of these stereotypes. On Geziret el Arab St., one of the most famous commercial streets in all of Cairo, the residents were ready and, according to one participant, “had no time to ask questions... We would beat people up first, and then searched them for weapons and drugs.” Such quick decisions were almost certainly based off of the original location and the physical appearance of the suspect. The same participant continued by telling me that no person “with any common sense,” would have wondered onto other streets during such an uncertain times *unless they were “criminals.”* Such was the logic of the early *lijan* participants.

3.5.2 Insiders versus Outsiders

By establishing a visual image of the baltagy and attaching his identity to a particular geographic region, lijan participants were able to reaffirm an insider identity. Since residents would ask for state identification card at checkpoints, they were able to quickly recognize any outsiders who claimed residence in one of the stigmatized neighborhoods. Although not from that particular street, any Mohandeseen or Dokki residents travelling to other streets would be subject to less rigorous interrogation and were considered as “belonging from here.” Of course, we have seen that in streets like Geziret el Arab St., the lijan were indiscriminate in their defensive tactics.

As we have already seen, lijan participants established practices that would quickly identify their insider status. Visual markers, such as colored armbands and handwritten signs were quick ways to distinguish outsiders from insiders. Of course, not all lijan regularly used such markers. More important was the quickly established network of acquaintances. While they did not know each other’s names, lijan participants were able to recognize familiar faces early on. Together, newly created networks and visual markers reinforced one’s insider status, while residence in one of the more suspect neighborhoods placed an individual in the category of the other.

Paragraph. The table below is included so that there is an item in the sample List of Tables.

3.5.3 At the Checkpoint: Towards a Profile of the baltagy

The participants standing at major intersections were involved, where consciously or not, in a process of discerning insider qualities and distinguishing them from outside characteristics.

Those who stood at the checkpoints identified the baltagy visually. At the most general level, participants told me that you would know a baltagy as they approached because “they just didn’t look right” (*mish mazboot, shaklu shemal, or mish ‘sah’*). A participant took a holistic approach to recognizing a baltagy, rather than isolating specific characteristics. Such an approach is presumably done out of time-related convenience. Yet, in order for us to deconstruct the baltagy, we must isolate the parts that make up the whole thug.

The physical appearance of the baltagy is easily recognized from far distances. A baltagy is always male, usually between his mid-teens and late 20s, has a darker complexion, and had visible scars on his face (most likely from a knife-related attack). His preference in transportation is usually an unlicensed Chinese street motorcycle (silver-plated with Chinese characters on the side) or a rickshaw (Tok-Tok). These vehicles, because of their relatively affordable price tags, have long been associated with working and lower class Egyptians. The latter of the two, the rickshaw, is a particularly important mode of transportation within lower class neighborhoods. In fact, according to state law, rickshaws are prohibited from entering Mohandeseen, Dokki, and other middle and upper-middle class neighborhoods. His choice of weapons is usually a distinct switchblade, sword, or smaller form of a shotgun. Finally, a baltagy usually does not travel alone. Some of my participants insisted if there were two or more individuals on one of these motorcycles, both or all of these suspects were almost certainly baltagiyya.

As the baltagy approach the checkpoint, his behavior and self-presentation would become the next test. Most obvious is the baltagy’s intoxication (from alcohol or some other form of illegal substance). When asking participants how they could tell whether one was under the influence they referred to slurred speech, inability to make eye contact, and general swaying of the body. Also important was the baltagy’s use of language. A baltagy draws from a unique

repertoire of colloquial terms and phrases. If his unique diction is not apparent, then his sporadic hand movements are usually a quicker indicator of his status. Finally, one participant tells me that the baltagy almost always has a lisp not because of a natural speech disorder, but because he was always hiding a razor blade under his lip. It is only by isolating the individual physical and behavioral attributes of a baltagy that we come to see the complexity of the stereotype. Of course, at the checkpoint, these complexities are ruthlessly compressed into a one-dimensional image of the thug, usually out of convenience.

3.5.4 The Exceptional Baltagiyya

Most surprisingly, not all baltagiyya were deemed equal to lijan participants. The perceived danger depends on where a baltagy came from and what his intentions are in the location that he is discovered. At times, baltagiyya were not seen as immediate threats, though they were almost always suspected to continue their “immoral” conduct after the lijan demobilized. Even when the baltagy *was also a resident of the street and participant in the lijan*, he was only partially accepted by other residents “of a higher social status.” Indeed, he would be treated with extreme suspicion throughout the 15 days.

At times, the baltagy could be seen as an ally. For example, one resident of Gamaet El Dowwal St. responsible for receiving travellers from Bulaq eventually befriended five different baltagiyya. The process of befriending one another, however, did not resemble the approach that residents took with each other. Instead of exchanging biographical information, the resident and the baltagy established their relationship for strategic purposes only. The latter were allowed to enter Gamaet El Dowwal St. only after acting as a liaison between Mohandeseen and Bulaq residents. On one occasion, the participant at the Bulaq-Mohandeseen checkpoint was having

difficulty turning down a car full of suspected baltagiyya. The participant was able to contact his new “friend,” the baltagy, to come solve the conflict. When his contact arrived, he immediately scorned the younger passengers and told them to return to Bulaq, threatening them and claiming to know their fathers.

Another way a baltagy was accepted or went unquestioned was if they were in close geographic proximity to the neighborhood of residence. For example, a “known” baltagy from Bein al-Sarayut shared an intersection with Dokki’s Mohie El Din St. “I never expected to talk to *this type* of person in my life,” one participant, standing at the same checkpoint as a baltagy, told me. The individual, here, is deemed a baltagy solely on his physical appearance and place of residence. In fact, there was very little evidence that any of the suspected baltagiyya captured on the streets in this study actually committed any type of crime before they received punishment for their baltagiyya status. Another participant on Mohie el Din St. recalls standing at a checkpoint with an ex-con, also seen as a baltagy. Again, most interesting to our study is that despite cooperation with people seen as thugs, they are unable to evade being categorized by more economically and social privileged residents of nearby neighborhoods.

The continuing use of the term baltagiyya to describe some residents and outsiders should, by now, indicate that relationships were not equal within the lijan. For example, on Ahmad Rashad St., residents gave money to people from a nearby lower class neighborhood in exchange for protection. Such an action is a direct replication of the state’s logic and approach towards hiring baltagiyya to instill chaos on the 28th, the Day of Anger.

The baltagiyya became more than the target for the lijan during the early days of the revolution. Rather than being a static category, baltagiyya was picked up by residents, from the state ideology and practices, as a process by which insiders and outsiders were distinguished. As

defensive neighborhood groups, *lijan* require, at the very least, the *idea* of a *baltagy* in order to mobilize, sustain themselves over the 15 days, and justify policing non-residents. Mainly, this idea became manifest through physical appearance and geographic origin, both of which immediately changed the relationships between *lijan* in more and less economically privileged neighborhoods. It also affected the practices of the *lijan*. The very importance of checking state ID cards should be an indicator of the continuing use of state categories as methods of inclusion and exclusion. The *baltagiyya*, as an idea, caused some to “shoot first and ask questions later,” while motivating others to establish checkpoints with passwords, create markers of street-level identification, and so on. The maintenance of the term continued until the final days of the *lijan* and, as Iskandar (2011) points out, evolved and gained a life of its own after the 18 days of the revolution.

By the third and fourth day, the *lijan* had moved far beyond its spontaneous origins. *Lijan* on side and main streets had their own set of distinct social processes that affected the each resident differently. Yet, changing communication channels and the arrival of the military transformed what were once street-bounded groups into amorphous and rapidly growing networks of friends, families, and acquaintances. This allowed not only for a fluid membership, but also triggered the dissemination of useful practices and ideas. Eventually, *lijan* within the Mohandeseen-Dokki area came to resemble each other. Through this newly created network of *lijan*, stories and rumors quickly diffused within the neighborhood. Indeed, storytelling became one of the most important practices in the *lijan*’s 15 days of existence. Within their narratives, heroes were created and enemies established. The latter of the two would soon become the *lijan*’s

raison d'être. Without him, they ceased to have an enemy—an “other” to exclude, harass, and police. The baltagy, however, would become a less imminent threat as the lijan came to an end.

4.0 SIRENS, TANKS, AND BOREDOM: THE LAST DAYS OF THE LIJAN

Throughout my discussion, I have continually made the distinction between the “early days of the lijan” and a later, more routinized version of the phenomenon. This division—between the phases of the lijan—is useful not only for analytical purposes, but also for recreating the narratives that lijan participants told me about the 15 days. My initial set of semi-structured interview questions quickly changed to adapt to this distinction. For all of my participants, the lijan experiences differed once the military arrived and looting subsided—roughly 2- 4 days after its formation. Despite the relative security, however, lijan participants made the decision, even after the military occupied strategic checkpoints, to stay in the streets. With a decrease of suspected *baltagiyya* approaching the lijan, participants now had to decide how they would spend their time.

To an extent, the previous sections suggested that residents’ more relaxed approach to policing their streets enabled the lijan to gain a fluid membership. Yet, I delayed explaining precisely what they did with their time, what emotions they exhibited during these later days, and why they finally decided to return to their homes. Here, I focus on those last few days—those days were participants were relatively confident that they (and, now, the army) had secured their territory. The lijan—with its checkpoints, passwords, policing of neighborhood boundaries, and rumors—had become, according to many of my participants, an “ordinary” or routine aspect of everyday life during the revolution. But they had come a long way from the initial security

vacuum that had triggered their emergence. However, residents' attitudes about those they came to (however momentarily) replace had changed. I conclude by capturing their changed attitudes about these officials. While negative attitudes about the police and its relationship to the interior ministry were not constant and unanimous, the army was almost always perceived as one of the "hero" figures in the lijan story. These opinions and sentiments—about and towards the army and police—were inextricably linked to the decision return to one's home. Here, I insist that on February 11th, after 15 days of lijan activity, participants had to make an *active* decision to retreat from the streets.¹⁴

4.1 BOREDOM AND EXHAUSTION: THE POLITICS OF GOING HOME

I realize that calling even the later days of the lijan routine or ordinary may elicit criticism. Yet, we must not forget the original intention, the most general objective, of the lijan: to fill in the security vacuum. The replacement of one security apparatus with another comes from the desire to create an oasis of stability in a sea of (perceived) chaos—that is, the political uncertainty during the initial 18 days of the revolution. This is not to say that lijan participants seeking stability "back home," wanted anything less than the resignation of Mubarak. Quite the contrary, my interviewees almost unanimously admitted their support for activists in Tahrir. If they did not want Mubarak out, my interviewees at least supported the occupation of Tahrir *by their friends and family*. So this desired stability came not from lofty and elaborate political ideals, and was, instead, grounded in local, material concerns. Securing one's streets came from the desire to

¹⁴ Evidence of this was the fact that, in so-called popular neighborhoods (e.g., Imbaba, Mit Oqba, Bulaq), many residents continued their lijan activities and even chose to formalize them into "popular committees." For studies that have looked at these post-February lijan, see: (Bremer 2011; El Meehy 2012; Rayan 2013).

protect one's property and family. In only a few days—and in the case of the exceptional Geziret el Arab St., a few hours—the military would aid in this process of stability. Through communication channels—that emerged from the processes of roaming around to other friends' checkpoints; of calling friends and relatives to ask about the events on their streets; and of watching televised reports of the *lijan*—practices, such as securing checkpoints, shouting “wake up,” establishing barricades, and carrying arms, had become accepted as the normal functioning of the streets. Routinized banality, however, is not synonymous with formalization. If anything, the later *lijan* exhibited processes of *deformalization*. In this subsection, I focus on how participants transitioned and adapted their behavior once the tanks appeared and looting ceased.

For the young participants, a less dangerous *lijan* almost meant a less eventful one. At checkpoints, especially during the overnight shifts, participants' primary objective became less about looking out for *baltagiyya* and, according to a resident on Lebanon St., more about “having fun, going out, and passing the time.” Of course, there were some *lijan* that were more vulnerable to crime even during the final days. For example, neighborhoods that bordered Egypt's major highway, the Ring Road (*ad Da'iri*), had been on high alert throughout the 15 days because of the road's notoriety of being the main artery of travelling *baltagiyya*. Helping friends out in the more “unstable” areas or neighborhoods, for one of my interviewees, became a common practice.

Yet, for the most part, participants in Mohandeseen and Dokki engaged in less altruistic activities. As friends gathered at each other's *lijan*, one could find them playing cards, chess, backgammon, soccer, and PlayStation; taking walks to nearby *lijan* (the most common leisurely activity); smoking hookah and drinking tea at cafes; sharing jokes, stories, and the latest rumors; watching television (the technique on how to wire the television to reach the street was also

shared among the lijan!); and listening to music. “I got to know Bob Marley very well during this time,” one participant tells me with a straight face. Indeed, one could refer to such activities as the “Politics of Fun” (Bayat 2007)—where fun is “an array of ad hoc, nonroutine, and joyful conducts,” (434) that counters the now routine, *though still political*, features of the lijan. The very act of occupying one’s streets and policing others from getting in, including officials, rendered the lijan political up until the final day. Yet, these concluding moments in the lijan are more likely to have been remembered for their leisurely activities than the more functional practices performed during a more uncertain time.

Some were more affected than others by the now relatively relaxed lijan activities. Indeed, one could argue that many successfully found this oasis of stability, at least at their doorstep. A Tiba St. lijan participant tells me, “All I needed [during this period] was my music and the energy of the streets to keep me going...I was just looking for some peace.” This moment of tranquility was accompanied by a newly discovered solidarity bounded by territory. He continues by telling me how he discovered similarities between his and other residents’ interests, and that they would spend time exchanging their favorite music and films with one another. Some, with a sigh of relief, welcomed the psychological and physical relaxation that military presence afforded lijan participants.

Others, however, mentioned a slowly creeping boredom. One participant on Mohie El Din St. complained, “you could go anywhere, but there was nothing to do...you did anything to pass the time since most of it was in the street.” Another interviewee, a participant in the Ahmad Rashad St. lijan, echoed this concern, asking me rhetorically, “What else could you do? When you went back upstairs...it was one thing or another: television or sleep.” One participant, commenting on night shifts, told me that he “was usually a night person,” but that, by the end, he

could not bear the long hours at the checkpoint. He decided, before Mubarak has resigned, to go back home.

By February 10th, the eve of Mubarak's resignation, residents who had been patrolling Mohandeseen and Dokki for more than two weeks, were exhausted.¹⁵ The participant of the Gamaet el Dowwal St. lijan—who had earned a reputation for dealing with the Bulaq baltagiyya, driving their rickshaws, playing middleman between residents and army officials, and visiting Tahrir—was the most vocal among my interviewees about the toll the lijan had took on him. A participant from Mohie el Din St. agreed, insisting “We were of course tired, *and this wasn't our duty or responsibility*, so we were actually relieved to go back up to our homes and rest.” Why were they so tired? We can look to the great accomplishment of the lijan: ordinary people—previously apolitical or politically marginalized people—came out in the streets and revealed their extraordinary ability to (temporarily) replace Egypt's most notorious institution—an institution that had been so carefully constructed by Mubarak for 30 years. Egyptians had successfully, although with the help of the military, rendered their security forces obsolete. As Mubarak resigned, on February 11th, celebrations quickly went beyond those in Tahrir Square. Yet, the lijan participants—who had occupied the streets for 15 days—had to make a conscious decision: would they trust the very police that abandoned them on the 28th of January, the Day of Anger, to return to their posts?

¹⁵ One exception came from a participant on a side street lijan, who told me, “I didn't want to leave [the streets]...[I continued to go down].” Indeed, he would continue to protect his father's store on Tiba St. almost five days after Mubarak's resignation (February 11th)—a day where almost all lijan, with the exception of a few in Egypt's poorer neighborhoods—demobilized.

4.2 THE POLICE: OPINIONS AND COOPERATION

Towards the end of my interviews, as my respondents were wrapping up their experiences in the *lijan*, I asked about the attitudes they had towards state officials—specifically, the police and army.¹⁶ I soon found out that opinions about these two institutions were changing throughout the course of the 18 days. One reason for this is because of the events of Tahrir. January 28th (the day of anger) and February 2nd (the Battle of the Camel)—two days marked with incredible police repression—solidified the already hostile attitudes against the police. After all, activists had intentionally chosen January 25th, the national police holiday and first day of mass mobilization, to protest neither Mubarak nor his regime in general, but the security forces and the Ministry of Interior specifically. To this day, some continue to argue that it remained a revolution against the police (Ismail 2012). Yet, if national developments could affect residents' opinions, so could concrete relationships with those who belonged or represented these repressive bodies. In the *lijan*, police officers were recognized not only as the foot soldiers of this viciously draconian institution; they were also seen as residents that were sometimes present on the streets. Negative opinions about police make the *lijan* experience—which according to one interviewee was about “playing cop”—particularly complex. In this section, I explore the on-the-

¹⁶ Memory related to past opinions and attitudes should be approached with particular caution. Opinions about the police and especially the military may have been shaped by more recent events. One only could imagine the necessarily positive stories Egyptians would have told about the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) immediately following the 18 days; the negative image they earned after one year in office; and finally, the polarized image of the institutions after their coup in 2013. The failure to sentence police officers to prison is also likely to have amplified negative opinions towards these forces. Nonetheless, many of the initial opinions were formed during the initial 18 days of the revolution, and changing attitudes related to the interactions that participants had with state officials during the 15 days of the revolution. Because they constantly refer to concrete events and developments within this delimited time period, and for the most part avoid sweeping generalizations, one could reasonably rely that such opinions have remained relatively similar. Additionally, I would emphasize that the interviewee focus on the 15 days and not later developments when telling me about these attitudes.

ground and more abstract relationships that residents had with police officers and the institution they represented.

The story of the *lijan* would be incomplete without capturing the relationship between participants and state officials. I have already discussed how some participants—four of my interviewees—clashed with security forces, in Tahrir, only hours before they first began organizing their respective *lijan*. Kareem’s story—of the ambulance that was filled with police weapons and ammunition instead of medical equipment—is particularly important to his initial opinions of the police. Others remember only the tear gas canisters making their way to the ground beneath them. Initial encounters on the Day of Anger were among the first mentioned when participants told me how they felt about these repressive forces.

If police repression in Tahrir was met with criticism, their disappearance—the national event partially responsible for the *lijan*’s formation—left residents furious and blindsided. "The worst thing [that] the police did was disappear," one participant told me. In a more ambiguous tone, another respondent told me that, "it was as if the police took a vacation." But for many Egyptians, vanishing security forces and the proliferation of theft went hand-in-hand. "The whole conspiracy could have been concocted by a few officers," a third participant argued. With rumors running high, many came to believe that state officials, specifically those belonging to the Ministry of Interior, were responsible for the sudden appearance of supposed *baltagiyya*. Whether the assumed relationship between security forces and suspected criminals was verifiable or not, the result was unambiguous: the police were nowhere to be found. If only for a moment, this robbed them of any remaining legitimacy they could have had.

These attitudes, however, were quickly shaped as residents made a not-so-shocking discovery: police could also be residents. If there were *any* positive responses to police action

during the 15 days, it was a direct consequence of individual officers, *who were in some cases friends with residents on the street*. Often in plain clothes, officers were quickly utilized for their resources. When residents on Tiba St. realized they were ill equipped to deal with captured suspects, a police officer revealed himself and offered his assistance. Although military officers would prove to be more useful allies, individual police officers provided walkie-talkies—an important method of communication during the media blackout—as a practical way to call local police departments. Even on main streets, lijan participants were given phone numbers of local officers. “If there were emergencies, we would call the police officers...that we knew had the *real* weapons, to come give us support,” one resident told me. Apparently, some participants were not confident in their ability to secure the streets even during the lijan’s most self-sufficient phase.

Paradoxically, many told me that the presence of resident police officers provided a sense of security. One resident on Abd El-Hameed Lotfy St. was reassured by the very fact that a retired police officer lived one floor below his own apartment. On Mohie El Din St., another officer kept his sirens on overnight to keep suspected baltagiyya from approaching the street. “Imagine hearing the sirens all night...[but] even then, we weren’t fully confident of the police.” Despite the resources provided by officers, participants’ ambivalence continued to linger.

Lijan participants’ mistrust would often be vindicated by the behavior of non-resident officers. Even after exchanging phone numbers and receiving walkie-talkies that allowed residents to contact police officers, responses by local police stations were not always desirable. Time and again, officers at the Mohandeseen and Dokki police departments claimed to “have no space.” “Call the army,” another officer told one lijan member on Geziret el Arab St. Some residents, however, were more comfortable keeping suspects *under their own supervision*. After

all, if rumors were true, then the police were practically the sponsors of the *baltagiyya*; handing suspects over to police stations, many of my respondents insisted, was often guaranteeing their freedom.

The presence of officers, resident and non-resident, caused each *lijan* participant's opinions to swing like a pendulum. The following story, told to me by a resident on Tiba St., captures the volatile dynamic of this uneasy relationship:

One day, as Waleed and others were standing at a checkpoint, they saw two minibuses rapidly approaching their street. From a distance, they could see an overwhelming number of people in each one of the minibuses; even more worrying were the silhouettes of their weapons. The older men took their stations and pointed their rifles, shotguns, and pistols directly at the approaching vehicles. As the car approached, a man got out of the car. "When we saw that [the minibuses] had more men and weapons than we could handle, our hearts dropped...that's when we got really worried. We were running directly towards them, as if it were battlefield. I remember thinking to myself, then, that 'either I die or they will.'"

Both vehicles stopped. A single man, dressed all in black and "with a weapon in every place imaginable," exited the minibus. With the residents' guns pointed directly at him, the man raised his arms and claimed to be a high-ranking police officer. According to him, he and his officers were travelling to all the neighborhoods, seeing if any residents needed assistance. The two minibuses, he continued to make his case, were filled with volunteer officers.

Only after a *resident police officer* admitted to having called his colleagues to provide assistance, did the residents decide to put down their weapons. With the situation diffused, the officers were allowed to justify their visit. On his way out, the man dressed entirely in black—who seemed to be their superior—thanked the residents and told them that there are minibuses that are going around that will "cause you no harm, but others will... [So] treat them exactly as you did me." Keep your weapons up and treat suspicious outsiders with extreme caution and suspicion: this was the message handed down by the officers. The younger residents took down the license numbers of the two minibuses while the older men took their phone numbers. They thanked them as they left.

Although moments like these were obviously exceptional in their frequency, they embody the complex relationship that residents, resident-officers, and non-resident officers often had with one another. Rather than simply generalizing and demonizing all officers or the larger

institutional structure, participants constantly reshaped their opinions after daily encounters. Often, however, outside officers were treated with more suspicion, as we saw with the aforementioned story.

Participants standing at the checkpoints were not always so understanding of approaching officers. Not all residents had a trustworthy or even suspicious officer on their respective streets. Yet, all of my interviewees claim to have interacted with at least one *outside* officer at a checkpoint. They were more likely to travel on side streets, since it was there that they were less likely to be harassed; to their misfortune, the officers had miscalculated. On Iran St., for example, a police officer was searched at every checkpoint so that, by the time that he had arrived to the last checkpoint, he was in tears: “Imagine a police officer crying! He must have thought, ‘has it come to the point that me, a police officer, is being check by ordinary citizens?’”

Some saw this as a humorous or empowering spectacle, while others chose to refrain from engaging in such behavior. More than one of my interviewees told me that the residents on their street “were better” than to participate in such antics, claiming the many officers were “good people” (*Ibn an-nas*). Yet the overwhelming majority chose to check officers not because they suspected them of any criminal behavior (after all, what would they be checking them for, weapons?). Instead, they took the opportunity to publicly humiliate officers, who so commonly did the same in the decades leading up to the revolution: “pay back,” as one of my interviewees succinctly put it. “You would have,” he continued, “a child, 17 or 18 years old, that would throw the police officer’s ID on the ground after checking it...or yelling ‘you better not come through here again,’ as he passed through the checkpoint.” Whether one saw police harassment as revenge, entertainment, and/or justice, searching officers and their vehicles during the 15 days

become a symbolic gesture—one that insisted that ordinary Egyptians had redefined or broken, though only for a moment, the power structure that had subordinated them for decades.

Indeed, this challenge—this dramatic practice—was short-lived and had remarkable affects on the participants who saw the “harassment” of individual officers as exaggerated, unnecessary, or unjust. Remarkably, many of my interviewees came to sympathize with the officers, claiming to have stood in their shoes for 15 days! “You know,” one resident begins to tell me, “We learned how much they have to deal with everyday and how they were receiving so much abuse.” Kareem—*the same individual that had been fighting with cops in Tahrir on the 28th and saw an ambulance full of ammunition*—had changed his perspective. Far away from Tahrir, the individual had now experienced the checkpoint; he had been inducted into the world of policing, however informally and ephemerally. For those who sympathized with police, but did not have this dramatic shift in perspective, the experience of harassing police became evidence that “they weren’t powerful anymore.” Yet, this statement was one of pity, not pride.

In Tahrir, attitudes towards the police were almost always extremely hostile; after all, tear gas canisters, birdshots, and batons should not be met with open arms. Within the *lijan*, the relationship was more complex. To be sure, some of my interviewees left the *lijan* with their opinions unchanged. “I always felt they were like trash, and they continued being like that,” one respondent insists. More commonly, however, attitudes towards the police, despite the national hostility towards them, were more ambiguous. Resident police caused some to sympathize with individual officers. Others seized the opportunity, mainly at checkpoints, by searching officers and giving them a taste of their own medicine—although, unlike the officers, participants refrained from giving them a lethal dosage. A combination of national developments and local

experiences shaped attitudes, often on a daily basis. Most surprisingly, by the final day, many had agreed, “there are good cops and bad cops.” This tendency—to equate a repressive security apparatus in its entirety only to the individuals that comprise it—is likely a result of their encounters with the state during the 15 days of the *lijan*. Even more remarkable was the willingness, of residents, to welcome the police after Mubarak had left. When I asked one participant how he could trust a police force that had only recently betrayed him, he responded quite confidently: “We cannot live without them...I never thought that the military or the police were one-hundred percent bad: there are some good, and some bad...So it is ridiculous to even think of getting ‘rid’ of the police...what does that even mean, getting rid of them?” At least to some individuals, “playing cop”—that is, filling in the vacuum of a negligent police force—was only a short-term responsibility. The *lijan* would come and go in 15 days, but the police would remain.

4.3 THE ARRIVAL OF THE ARMY ONTO THE STREETS: OPINIONS AND COOPERATION

If the police’s disappearance and return was met, by the *lijan*, with an incredible ambivalence, attitudes towards the military were less ambiguous. Although the opinions towards the army were overwhelming positive and remained so during the 15 days of the *lijan*, these attitudes were also shaped by first-hand experiences and national politics. And like the police’s disappearance, it would be impossible to talk of the *lijan sha’biyya* without discussing the role of the military.¹⁷

¹⁷ In fact, two of my interviewees told me that they first heard a call to form *lijan* from a speech by a military officer

In Tahrir, we saw images of demonstrators hugging and kissing soldiers, children sitting on tanks, and officers waving the national flag. In the lijan, we see a more strategic military meeting the necessity of ordinary Egyptians. Indeed, the lijan went only two to four days *without* military presence. Although “the people” became the heroes during the 15 days of the lijan and the 18 days of the revolution, the military was a close second.

To an extent, residents looked to the military for many of the same reasons that they relied on resident-police officers: resources. Yet, whereas resident and non-resident police officers were, in almost every instance, unsuccessful at assisting with the aims of the lijan, the military was overwhelmingly effective. Above all, they were able to seize any suspects and bring them to a military compound for questioning. Even on Geziret el Arab St., the military was able to take away thirty suspects on the first day. But when the residents asked them to set up a checkpoint on the street, one officer told them, “you captured thirty suspects by yourselves! You all are doing a good job.” The officers took the suspects and left the lijan to their own devices. At other moments, the military made shockingly clear their dedication to the street:

On the second day (January 29th), Samar was standing at a checkpoint when he heard gunshots coming from a distance. Assuming that the shots originated on Gamaet el Dowwal St., Samar quickly hopped in his car and decided to investigate. As he approached the intersection of Mohie el Din St. and Gamaet el Dowwal St., he saw a car racing by with a passenger shooting a machine gun out of the window. Quite curiously, Samar decided to speed after them with no plans on how to capture them. As he raced between checkpoints on Gamaet el Dowwal St., two officers waved him down and stopped him. But instead of searching him, as was customary at the checkpoints, the officers jumped in the back seat of his sedan and demanded that he continue following the car. As they reached the vehicle, the officers aimed their weapons out the windows and fired at the suspects. The men swerved off the road fled into an apartment building, but were eventually arrested several hours later. After the episode, Samar and the officers exchanged numbers.

Even when military forces were not physically present on a street, however, they would often provide participants, standing at major intersections, with their phone numbers or a walkie-talkie.

One interviewee even told me that there was an “army hotline.” And unlike the police, the military would never tell residents, “Our prisons are full.”

One reason for this positive cooperation may have nothing to do with the lijan. Mandatory enrollment in the armed forces for a period of one to three years brings an institution closer to its population. The individuals that drove the tanks and designated new, strategic checkpoints came not from the high ranks; indeed, the latter were too busy with Tahrir. Instead, young lijan participants found soldiers their age standing with them, side-by-side, on their own streets. A participant on Ahmad Rashad St. lijan told me that he frequently enjoyed the company of the soldiers standing near his street and even once spent time at a *military checkpoint*. Another participant told me that this “feeling that everything was new,” was not just a sentiment among young lijan participants, but officers as well. After all, for young military officers, it was the first time they had occupied residential neighborhoods. The similar inexperience presumably led the two forces to cooperate in protecting the streets.

The contrast, between attitudes towards the police versus that of the army, goes beyond the former’s inability to provide material resources to lijan participants. Impossible to separate the events of Tahrir from the rest of the nation, the fervor surrounding the military’s backing of demonstrators in the square gave them a privileged status. Yet, their support was felt on the streets of ordinary Egyptians *before it was experienced in Tahrir*. Indeed, the earliest account of military arrival in the neighborhood seems to have occurred within only a few hours of the lijan’s emergence. The military would take almost two weeks to fully support demonstrators in Tahrir. “It was the first time I saw something like it...I mean there was a military tank on my street,” one participant reminisces. And while turning police sirens on for a single night may have scared off a few potential suspects, the physical presence of military tanks *guaranteed* a decrease in

attempted entry onto a street. The positive response to their arrival was unanimous among my interviewees. Even those who rebuked their current dictatorial status and draconian policies recall that at “the time, the military was [our] father...Father of the nation.”

If the appearance of military had fundamentally shaped the lijan experience, so too would the announcement of Mubarak’s resignation. Even before the 11th of February, however, the military had affected residents’ willingness to continue protecting the streets. One day earlier, they told the lijan participants on Mohie el Din St. “you could go home now...your work is done.” Indeed, this became a theme common among many streets. With the military taking over Tahrir Square, and with Mubarak out, it was assumed the streets’ “natural order” would return. Such confidence may explain the unfortunate support the military now receives in all of its despotic tendencies. The “hero” status of the military during the 18 days of the revolution may continue to resonate among many Egyptians. Perhaps the residents, those who had occupied the streets for 15 days, had “gone home” too soon.

5.0 CONCLUSION

For those early observers—those eyewitnesses to the theft so prevalent during the 28th—the Friday of Anger was only half of the story; the other half would unfold as they made their way home from Tahrir. Rumors and firsthand accounts of shattering windows, exposed firearms, and opportunistic seizure of practically any material goods proved to be an incendiary situation. Despite great uncertainty and anxiety, residents went down to the streets to defend themselves, their families, and their property. One block at a time, they would earn the trust of their fellow neighbors. Before these networks were established, however, residents responded to a looming danger through individualistic tactics. Having already constructed the enemy in one's mind, with help of the previously crafted state discourse on the *baltagiyya*, participants thought to beat the latter with their own logic.

Gunshots rang through the night of the 28th, only to create more confusion among residents. Yet, *lijan* participants who sought out more collective and effective approaches quickly replaced such tactics. “Wake up” and “watch out,” yelled the *lijan* participants, as they transformed blockades into checkpoints. And whether they established formal shifts or not, the streets would never be left unguarded. Coercion, however, was not the primary incentive to keep protestors in the streets. Rather, by creating accountability measures, friends and neighbors came to expect those who were not journeying to Tahrir, to protect their own neighborhoods. And despite the initial anxiety during the early days of the *lijan*, residents were able to walk to other

checkpoints, call one another on landlines (and eventually cellphones), and notify military officers of captured suspects. This expansion of the *lijan* beyond one's immediate territory, from the first degree of familiarization to the last, gave the groups a certain fluidity.

Spatial and social mobility, however, would not be granted to all. The checkpoints were not simply spaces of stories and rumors, but also of screening and exclusion. While resident and non-resident police officers were jokingly harassed as they passed through the less public side streets, individuals and groups who resided in Cairo's *manatiq sha'biyya* were practically forced to stay within the limits of their own neighborhoods. If these individuals were filled with the same curiosity that had allowed residents from middle and upper-middle class Dokki and Mohandeseen to visit friends and join demonstrations in Tahrir, they would quickly pay the price. One's diction, choice of clothing, and general appearance was enough to render him the enemy of the *lijan*. With passwords established at checkpoints, and because practically all *lijan* participants knew each other early on, it would not take long for the outsider to be recognized. Even when a resident was regarded as a *baltagy* (usually without any evidence), he was dismissed during debates and suspiciously observed at checkpoints. "Once a *baltagy*, always a *baltagy*," the logic went. But instead of simply rebuking the *lijan* in middle class neighborhoods for their practices of exclusion—as discriminating as they were—it would be more productive to see how, through the discursive and aesthetic construction of the *baltagy*, participants had managed to create a convenient system for policing the streets that had only recently been abandoned. And what better way is there to unify the residents of a street than to manufacture territorially delimited solidarity? Presumably, it was the combination of participants' inexperience and their reliance on state-sponsored rumors that led to the convenient

appropriation of the baltagy discourse from the state. Eventually, however, as threats proved to be less imminent, residents relaxed their practices at the checkpoints.

Fears were alleviated and expansion was made possible in large part by the physical presence of military personnel on the most strategic streets. This, as we have seen, led to diverging experiences and practices for those participants on the more residential side streets. On main streets, military generals provided participants with their personal phone numbers in exchange for suspected baltagiyya. Regardless of the spatial differences, the *lijan* on *all* streets were transforming, quite rapidly, into more banal and routinized forms of their previous selves. Soccer matches, endless roaming, and laughter filled the air once inundated by gunpowder and yelling. For those who had first mobilized during the early days of the *lijan*, exhaustion and boredom gradually sapped the energy that had previously seemed to be of infinite supply. As Mubarak's already waning power completely withered, and as the military began to tightly grasp onto a power they have yet to let go of, residents found less reason to stand out in the streets. After all, their very emergence was a response to the de facto collapse of the state's security apparatus. Rather than to continue to exercise their new and extraordinary politics, they quickly accommodated and gained confidence in a not too different state.

6.0 DISCUSSION: URBAN SPACES, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND THE PARADOX OF THE LIJAN

Although the power of a narrative could be left to stand on its own, I believe the story of the *lijan sha'biyya* can provide some useful lessons. I would like to briefly mention some of the larger implications of the *lijan*'s formation and practices. The spatial dimension of the *lijan*, discussed in section three, can hopefully generate dialogue between two similar, though incubated disciplines. Even more importantly, the emergence of the *lijan* during a security vacuum, its method of controlling the streets, and its relationships with the military and police problematizes the distinction between state and civil society, specifically during revolutionary moments where institutions belonging to the former seem to be in question (Kurzman 2004). The significance of the *lijan* narrative goes beyond providing a voice to the practices and experiences of ordinary Egyptians; it tries to capture a revolution in some of its complexity and uncertainty.

The importance of the physical structure of the street and its relationship to the larger neighborhood makes studying the *lijan* a particularly useful way to tie the literatures on social movements and urban spaces. Both literatures have, for a time now, recognized the rapidity by which urbanization has occurred. For the former, urbanization is but a segment of the larger process of modernization, which can often influence the emergence of a revolution (Skocpol 1982). In the latter school, scholars explain rapidly transforming urban spaces through the neoliberal trajectory (Davis 2006). What does this mean for public spaces in Cairo? In short, they

become, for a large majority of Egyptians, a space for political struggle, economic survival, and competition (Singerman 2009). Even before the revolution, Cairo had become what Bayat (2012) refers to as a “city-inside-out.” As states and elites colluded with each other and robbed the subaltern of a reasonable quality of life, the latter appropriated public spaces in order to survive. Responding to the subaltern’s encroachment, elites and state officials then made an escape to the outskirts of the city, protected by their gated communities.

Studying these same urban spaces during moments of revolution provides us with some nuance. Whether residential or commercial, targeted or ignored, the physical and symbolic importance of the street before the 15 days of the *lijan* affected initial experiences with theft and how residents subsequently responded. The link, then, between space and organization becomes inextricably linked at birth. The moment they closed off blocks and entire neighborhoods, the *lijan* created physical but also political and social demarcations. Neither military nor police officers could cross into *lijan* without being checked. Thus, it was a public space for (some) citizens, but not for Mubarak’s state officials. This active reshaping of public spaces by individuals and groups is not necessarily new to Egypt, as Bayat (2012) demonstrated, but only in 2011 did it become evident that it was not a class-related phenomenon. Despite the emphasis that some place on popular neighborhoods in Egypt—not to mention the argument that informal practices, mutual aid, and contestations of public spaces are somehow only linked to subaltern classes (Ismail 2006; Singerman 2009; Singerman and Amar 2006)—the *lijan* narrative demonstrates that informal, spontaneous, and spatial processes go beyond these spaces.

The story of the *lijan sha’biyya* also raises important questions regarding the concept of “civil society.” Since the 1980s, discussions around Egypt’s place within the authoritarian-democratic spectrum have led many to deliberately and politically link civil society to

democratizing processes of the state (Aarts and Cavatorta 2013). To the liking of many, this also enabled observers to dismiss militant and nonmilitant Islamist groups due to their exclusivist ideology and political legacy (Al-Sayyid 1993). Movement literature has also divided Egypt's civil society from within. Divisions in the 1970s and 1980s were mostly drawn between Islamists (if included), Leftists, and workers. More than decade later, however, another distinction was made between the formal (conventional) avenues of participation, exemplified by “pro-democratic” movements like Kefaya and the April 6th Movement, and more gradual processes of resistance emerging from the “informal” neighborhoods of Cairo (also known as “ashwa'iyyat”) (Ismail 2006; Singerman 2009). The concept of “civil society,” if useful at all, must be divorced from its liberal-normative ends. In doing so, it can become inclusive, recognizing actors and informal groups that may or may not act with explicitly political intentions. Otherwise, the mass mobilization of entire neighborhoods in Cairo could not be included within the definition.

It is unclear whether the *lijan* can be classified into any of the aforementioned categories that scholars include in their definitions of Egyptian “civil society.” The *lijan sha'biyya* were informal, resembling the supposedly “subaltern” politics in the region, but were also exclusionary, “defending” themselves from some pre-defined other. The construction of the *baltagy*—as the central enemy of the *lijan*—could not have been possible without tapping into the state discourse. Nor did they represent the lofty ideals of any predetermined ideological program. These were not the celebrated “twitter” revolutionaries nor were they the feared Salafis; these were Egyptians from every walk of life. The question remains and should be further developed in future research: Is the *lijan* revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, part of civil society or the state?

It would be unfortunate to remember the 18 days of the 2011 Egyptian revolution without mentioning the 15 days of the *lijan sha'biyya*. If intellectuals writing about the Arab Spring and specifically the Egyptian Revolution should have one current objective, it is to attempt to capture social and political processes in all of their complexity. This means looking beyond the explicit political demands made by organized social movement groups. This also means moving away from analyzing “big politics” and the events that shape them. The literature on the Egyptian revolution should not contribute to the “history from above” in the same way that past scholarship has done. A revolution that began with the spontaneous actions of ordinary Egyptians is likely to continue in the back streets, especially now that the military has forcibly removed most protestors from the major spaces. Research that is based on empirical data about local activities is much needed in the post-2011 sea of grand theorization. It is my hope that by telling the *lijan* story, I may contribute to this body of data and offer new ways to look at the transformation of urban spaces during revolutionary moments.

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY

Lajna (s.)/ lijan (pl.) sha’biyya	Popular committee(s)
Lajna/lijan	(Egyptian colloquial Arabic): Security checkpoint(s)
Baltagy (s.)/baltagiyya (pl.)	Thug(s)
Muezzin	Islamic figure who leads the call to prayer in mosques
Bawwab (s.)/Bawwabeen (pl.)	doorman/doormen
Ishah	wake up
Ilhaa	go after him/her/them
Manatiq Sha’biyya	“popular” (often seen as middle and/or lower-class) neighborhoods
Ibn an-nas	roughly refers to individual of a high or respectable social status

APPENDIX B

A METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

Due to the power of the narrative, I decided to discuss my methodology only after telling the lijan story. I became interested in studying the lijan after hearing second hand accounts from friends and relatives in Egypt, who participated in popular committees during the 15 days. Although I first wanted to study the lijan that emerged *after* Mubarak's resignation—specifically because of their location in “popular” neighborhoods—I found myself more equipped to study Mohandeseen and Dokki because of my personal connections in the two neighborhoods.

Upon arriving in Egypt in December 2013, I contacted a close relative that immediately connected me with friends and acquaintances who he had met during his experience in the lijan. By the second day of my month long trip, I had schedule four interviews. From there, I employed the snowball method of finding research participants from the Dokki-Mohandeseen area.

I interviewed a total of 12 participants, all of who were in their early 20s to mid-30s. With the exception of a student, an individual who was unemployed, and a military officer, all my respondents had “white collar” jobs (e.g., engineers, graphic designers, doctor's assistance, etc.). Although I had originally planned on talking to 15 lijan participants, time constraints and a saturation of the material limited my number of interviews. Almost all interviews were

conducted at cafés or other informal settings and were *not* recorded due to the political instability and general paranoia that pervaded Cairo during the winter of 2013.

My original interview questions were relatively structured and included 39 questions. However, I quickly discovered that the *lijan* story emerged more naturally with an informal framework. By the third interview, I was more interested in *description* rather than answers. This, of course, meant that my initial interviews lasted for three to four hours. In general, however, the average interview ranged from 90 minutes to two hours. Almost all respondents began the informal session by tracing the trajectory of the *lijan*, from their first to last day of participations. They would continue with reflections on their overall experiences and often concluded by discussing current events, though I made my focus on the first 18 days of the revolution explicit. If they did not mention (1) communication methods, (2) *lijan* practices, or (3) their changing attitudes towards the police, military, or their fellow neighbors, I would intervene at appropriate times to inquire about such issues.

My dual identity as an Egyptian born in Cairo and raised in the U.S. was made explicit to all participants, most of who welcomed and appreciated my candidness. And although I am fluent in Egyptian Arabic—the language used in all of the interviews—I often brought a resident of the neighborhood with me, who would sit at a nearby table in the event that translation became difficult. Luckily, there were almost no translation or communication issues. If a word came up in the interview that was not easily translatable (e.g., *gad'ana*), I would ask the respondent to further describe the word and its related concept. Overall, the interviews were focused, clear, and often interrupted due to the fluidity of the *lijan* narrative.

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